

by Heather E. Philip

2016

# An Examination of Online Swapping and Peer-to-Peer Renting:

Exploring the Providers, Takers, and Non-Users of  
Collaborative Consumption

University of Canterbury  
Christchurch, New Zealand

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the Degree of  
**Doctor of Philosophy in Marketing.**

*Supervisors: Paul Ballantine & Lucie Ozanne*



# Acknowledgements

*“There, but for the grace of God, go I” ... I owe the completion of this thesis to the many people and situations I have been graced to encounter. Thus, here, I would like to express my gratitude ...*

**My Readers** – If you are actually reading this thesis, thank you! I hope something in this document provides you with communicative resonance. I hope you find something to help you on your path of discovery in knowledge, and I hope you walk away with new ideas and curiosities.

**My Respondents** – Thank you for your interesting stories, ideas, and experiences that built the foundations for this paper.

*My Supervisors,*

**Paul Ballantine** – Thank you for always being positive. Everytime I felt that hopeless defeat creeping into my writing, you were always there to pull me back and stop my fall into a PhD meltdown. You have a wonderful gift in that everytime I walk away from your office I’m always smiling and full of the energy I need to keep going. Thank you for your extreme patience and willingness to answer my neverending questions. Thank you also for your meticulous attention to detail with editing, where even a differently formatted quotation mark and a misnumbered Figure in the Table of Contents did not miss your attention!

**Lucie Ozanne** – Thank you for always challenging me. Thank you for always sharing papers and ideas you thought would be relevant to my research. Your suggestion to reorganise my themes around Bardhi and Eckhardt’s six dimensions after I already had a framework written has made me have to dig deep into the literature, my data, and my own philosophical understanding for this thesis and I have come out of this PhD journey so much more aware and full of insight than I had ever been before. Thank you also for your close attention to detail with proofreading. Your recommendations to make my writing better have always been thought-provoking and challenging, but because of you, my thesis is hopefully now more ‘kind’ to the reader. And finally, thank you also for letting me watch over your dog Arthur while I was in New Zealand and missing my own dogs back in America!

*The many wonderful people at UC,*

**Jörg Finsterwalder** – Thank you for requiring us to use a template in your Relationship Marketing class in 2010. Although I originally found the requirement of a Table of Contents for a 5-page report as inane, without your template I would not have been challenged to figure out the complexities of Word through adding separate headers, break lines, captions, and so forth. Though heavily changed from your original template, I owe my ability to create a professional document thanks to you.

**Tony Garry** – Thank you for creating such an interesting assignment on SPI (subjective personal introspection) in your Advanced Consumer Behaviour class. Writing this paper opened the doors to my sociological imagination, as I had to heavily explore and justify the philosophical foundations that could guide a methodology of researcher introspection.

**Herb de Vries** – Thank you for giving me your perspectives into the complicated and messy world of grounded theory. Your personal discussions, suggested readings, and your own PhD thesis has helped guide me through the murky literature and for that I am grateful. Thank you also for your kindness on reaching out to say you liked my research proposal presentation as well as my presentation in Queenstown. Your words that I would make a great teacher have given me the confidence to keep going, and as it turns out, I love teaching! So thank you.

**Russell Wordsworth** – Thank you for reaching out to say you liked my research proposal presentation. Your kind words have stuck with me, and four years later I still feel the positive glow of confidence that a simple email of praise and support can inspire. So thank you.

**Ekant Veer** – Thank you for giving us absolutely no direction for your Advanced Marketing class. The lack of structure and complete freedom influenced my ability to critically think about research, reflect on my writing, and figure out how to plan a research paper.

**Sussie Morrish and Nicole Coviello** – Thank you for challenging me in your Advanced Marketing class. Because of you, I have become a better speaker and presenter.

**Michael Hall** – Thank you for your critical feedback. Your guidance and interesting assignments have helped me grow as a writer.

**Irene Joseph, Donna Heslop-Williams, Irene Edgar, ..., and UC staff** – Thank you for your kindness. I am grateful for your everyday help behind the scenes through my studies and I thank you for always putting a smile on my face when walking into the department.

*My fellow students,*

**Paula Arbouw** – Thank you for inviting me up to stay at your home. Working in the office together actually made doing work fun!

**Jeni Moir, Kate Mang** – Thank you for your PhD buddy support! You guys kept me sane and motivated, and it was always great to catch up.

*My past teachers,*

I can't remember all of your names! But I remember your faces and I remember your influence, so thank you for giving me the skills and ideas that made it possible for me to get this far.

**Terri Schurter** – Thank you for introducing me to Photoshop. I owe my success at adding an artistic touch to my theoretical memos thanks to you.

**Eric Conrad, Mrs. Oram, Mrs. B** – Thank you for making me a better writer.

*My Family,*

**Dr. John Philip, Granddad** – Thank you for giving me the crazy idea to study in New Zealand. I took your suggestion with spontaneous abandon and applied a week later. I would not have studied marketing or pursued an honours or PhD degree had it not been for you, so thank you.

**Uncle Ross, Amy, and Isa** – Thank you for being spontaneous and moving out to New Zealand. Had you not been there, granddad wouldn't have planted the seed for me to study abroad. Thank you for being there throughout my undergraduate programme and offering me a home away from home.

**Graham, Linnea, John, Maxwell, Mommom** ... Thank you for your love and support.

**Dejan Terzić** – Thank you for not skipping me. Your integral entrance into my life has been like a koru, an unfurling silver fern of hope. With you I have found new life, growth, strength, and inner peace. Danke, Volim Te.

# Abstract

**Purpose.** With the advent of social media and advances in Peer-to-Peer (P2P) online platforms, the phenomena of Collaborative Consumption (CC) has been developing in the popular press as a socioeconomic revolution that veers away from individual hyper-consumption and embraces the efficiencies of sharing and collaboration. In light of this groundswell, this thesis examines how two-sided digital platforms mediate the behaviour of peers in two CC website types: (1) swapping; and (2) renting.

**Methodology.** An exploration of philosophy for a sociological imagination yields the creation of a Model of Theoretical Perspectives inspired by critical realism. Using these philosophical foundations, semi-structured interviews with members of swapping and renting websites are conducted under the lens of an exploratory, grounded theory approach that asks, “What do we have here?”

**Findings.** The nature of the experience for swapping and renting users is explained by dimensionalising the field of Collaborative Consumption using thematic analysis. Six referential questions are applied to Bardhi and Eckhardt’s (2012) dimensions of access-based consumption: what (Type of Transferred Object), how (Consumer Involvement), when (Temporality), where (Spatial Anonymity), with whom (Interpersonal Anonymity), and why (Market Mediation and Political Consumerism).

**Contributions.** The nature of the experiences derived from these activities and how they may differ between user types is discussed. Motivating and deterring factors behind CC activities (swapping and renting) are compared and contrasted between different user types (Providers, Takers, and Non-Users). Findings from this study have implications for the design, implementation, and management of systems that encourage barter-trade and access-based forms of Collaborative Consumption. In particular, five enabling factors have been identified to overcome the deterrents for using these types of websites. Finally, a reflection of contributions and suggestions for future research is also provided.

**Keywords:** Collaborative Consumption, online peer-to-peer (P2P) exchange, swapping, bartering, P2P renting, access-based consumption, temporary disposition, temporary reacquisition, Providers, Takers, user malleability, second-hand consumption, grounded theory, critical realism.

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## Co-Authorship Form

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*This thesis involves data from both online swapping and P2P renting websites. The extracted co-authored work comes from a paper published in the Journal of Marketing Management (JMM) which covered my P2P renting findings.*

### Publication Details:

Philip, H. P., Ozanne, L. K., & Ballantine, P. W. (2015). Examining temporary disposition and acquisition in peer-to-peer renting. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 31(11-12), 1310-1332, DOI: 10.1080/0267257X.2015.1013490

### Extractions Details:

When writing the JMM publication, I took many chunks of text to use in the JMM publication that had already been written in this thesis. Therefore, almost all extracts used from the publication can be found within this thesis.

However, this thesis covers more material and in significantly more detail. I have also changed the layout so the bulk of the literature review falls into the findings section for this thesis (compared to the JMM publication).

**The largest cuttings/overlaps can be found in the following sections:**

- JMM Introduction (*pp. 1-2*)
  - Overlap of P2P renting background with Section 1.2.2 in this thesis
- JMM Literature Review (*pp. 2-5*)
  - Some overlap with literature review of disposition and acquisition in this thesis (Sections 2.3 and 2.4). Also overlap within the findings section, but completely changed in terms of order and literature integration.
- JMM Method (*pp. 5-7*)
  - All of the methods discussion from JMM is in this thesis, but with more detail; mostly from Sections 3.3.1, 3.3.2, and 3.3.3.
- JMM Findings (*pp. 7-15*)
  - All of the findings discussion can be found within this thesis (Chapter Four), but has been heavily altered and added to with more literature integration, as well as findings and literature about online swapping.

**Please detail the nature and extent (%) of contribution by the candidate:**

In terms of the JMM publication, I conducted 100% of the interview research, transcriptions, and coding as well as developing the general structure of the report. Ozanne significantly contributed to the findings with the suggestion of using Bhardi and Eckhardt's (2012) dimensions as a dominant structure for thematic analysis. Ozanne and Ballantine also contributed by adding literature and synthesis to the discussion, as well as editing for a more parsimonious flow.

**Certification by Co-authors:**

If there is more than one co-author, then a single co-author can sign on behalf of all

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- In cases where the candidate was the lead author of the co-authored work he or she wrote the text

**Name:** Paul Ballantine

**Signature:**



**Date:** 9 February 2016



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## (Section 1.1) Background of the Topic

My inspiration for this research is introduced by explaining how I first heard about Collaborative Consumption (CC) and subsequently became interested in Peer-to-Peer (P2P) renting and online swapping. To "frame the problem" and set the parameters for this research story, I then define CC within the extant literature.



## (Section 1.2) Research Overview

The main **Topics of Interest** are defined within the literature: P2P renting, online swapping, and Provider-Taker user types.

**Research Questions** are kept broad to answer the grounded theory purpose of figuring out, "What do we have here?"

The **Research Approach**: Conduct interviews with users of P2P renting and online swapping websites.



## (Section 1.3) Structure of Thesis

This thesis is written in five chapters: (1) Introduction, (2) Literature Review, (3) Methodology, (4) Findings, and (5) Discussion.

## 1.1 Research Background

This is a qualitative study that aims to explore what is going on in the world (i.e., what are people doing in a particular context and why are they doing it?). Human experience is often best understood through narratives (e.g., Polkinghorne, 1988). A narrative is a collection of stories (Dove, 2001) that allow us to describe “the present rising out of the past, heading into a future” (Novak, 1975, p. 258). Stories are powerful because they do more than present “a conglomeration of isolated facts” (Dove, 2001, p. 19), but rather give us different perspectives that reveal a more complete overview of phenomena. As a qualitative researcher, my job is to construct a story that acts as a missing piece to a larger narrative of understanding. Gaviria and Bluemelhuber (2010) insightfully noted that “the research questions we formulate often start by being a self-reflection of the author and his or her consumption behaviour” (p. 30). I must therefore acknowledge my role as storyteller (in adherence to a constructionist epistemology; see Charmaz & Mitchell, 1996) and share my personal inspiration for initiating this research. Thus, my vantage point for *this story* begins at a TED conference in Sydney, where Rachel Botsman (2010) presented two questions on stage:

“Hands up -- how many of you have books, CDs, DVDs, or videos lying around your house that you probably won’t use again, but you can’t quite bring yourself to throw away?” (0:32).

“How many of you have a power drill, own a power drill? Right. That power drill will be used around 12 to 13 minutes in its entire lifetime. (Laughter) It’s kind of ridiculous, right? Because what you need is the hole, not the drill. So why don’t you rent the drill, or, even better, rent out your own drill to other people and make some money from it?” (10:30).

Following the first question, she offered “swap-trading,” citing SwapTree – a website where you could swap your stuff with someone else. For the second question, I didn’t own a drill so the question shouldn’t have affected me, but it did. *Rent it out? Wait, what? We can rent out our stuff? Or swap it for something else? There are websites that offer this, and people are using them?* I hadn’t been aware of either of these disposal options, and like many other commentators on the TED website, I was intrigued. Botsman proceeded to open my eyes to an amplified world of second-hand consumption

evolving beyond online auction websites<sup>1</sup> and like many others, I believed in technology's disruptive potential for a revolution of consumption alternatives:

"I passionately believed [...] we were at the start of a profound transformation in the way technology could create the efficiency and trust to match millions of 'haves' with millions of 'wants' in ways and on a scale never possible before. The way we could think about supply and demand would change; the relationship between buyers and sellers would be disrupted; and the person formerly known as the 'consumer' would now get what they need from each other, taking control and value away from big centralized companies"

(Botsman, 2013, paragraph 2).

Botsman and Rogers (2010) pivotally defined this second-hand world of peers co-creating their desires as "Collaborative Consumption" (CC).<sup>2</sup> Similar conceptualisations have been discussed under a wave of innumerable names and topics<sup>3</sup> – such as: the mesh (Gansky, 2010), circular economy (e.g., Anderson, 2007), sharing (e.g., Belk, 2010), sharing economy (e.g., Hamari, et al., 2015; Heinrichs, 2013), product-service systems (e.g., Mont, 2001), access-based consumption (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012), and recirculation markets<sup>4</sup> (Arsel, 2016). Unfortunately, these terms and the examples cited as part of or not part of the Collaborative Consumption discourse have become increasingly inconsistent,<sup>5</sup> so there is not an agreed upon CC conceptualisation in the literature or the popular press (e.g., Dredge

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1 See Appendix C (**Table C.1**) for a list of CC website examples.

2 Semantically, "Collaborative Consumption" was first used by Felson and Spaeth (1978) to define "events in which one or more persons consume economic goods or services in the process of engaging in joint activities with one or more others" (p. 614). Thirty-two years later Botsman and Rogers (2010) recycled the phrase to explain "an unbounded marketplace for efficient peer-to-peer exchanges between producer and consumer, seller and buyer, lender and borrower, and neighbour and neighbour" (p. xiii). Felson and Spaeth's (1978) discussion of consumers sharing routine activities and experiences such as sharing a beer with friends is drastically different to the meaning "Collaborative Consumption" invokes today, for it once had to do with *consuming* with other individuals but now looks at collaborating disposition-acquisition *exchange* between individuals as Providers and Takers.

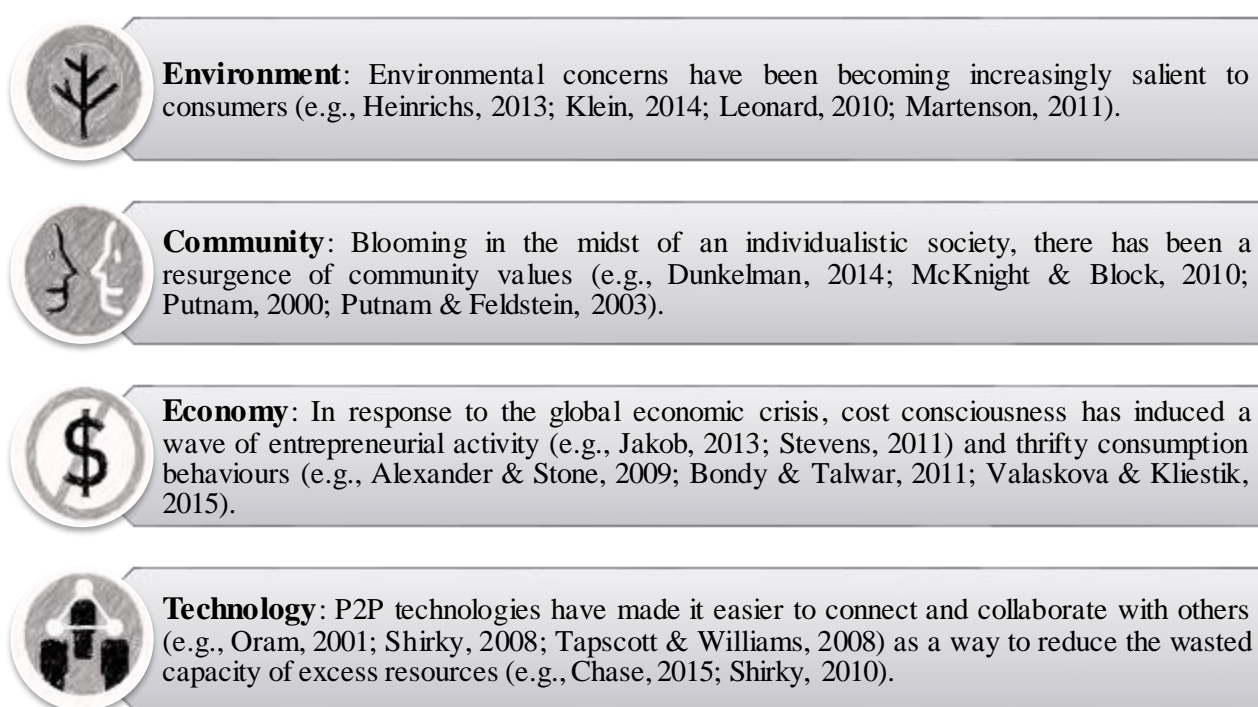
3 For a more thorough list of terminologies relating to Collaborative Consumption, I recommend looking at a recent paper which provides a chronological listing of some of the terms and definitions related to the sharing economy (see Dredge & Gymiothy, 2015, pp. 5-7).

4 A recent chapter by Arsel (2016, p. 6) looked at the circulation of things under the lens of value transformations. Unfortunately, the wording made me unsure what label she meant to use: "Instead of the label *collaborative redistribution*, as coined by Botsman and Rogers (2010), I use an alternative term..." – (this is incorrect because Botsman and Rogers' term was Collaborative Consumption, not collaborative redistribution). However, the label of collaborative redistribution closely aligns with my own definition of CC which focuses on disposition and reacquisition between consumers (thus redistribution which is collaborative). Arsel also used the term "recirculation markets."

5 For example, see Kessler (2015) who used the term "sharing economy" to discuss specific examples of how CC had grown "to include an odd menagerie of companies with little in common" and how the "original 'sharing economy'" which was supposed to "inspire human interaction and create less waste" had been "morphed into the pure capitalism that it is today" (no pagination).

& Gymiothy, 2015; McArthur, 2015; Richardson, 2015). Indeed, many recent articles criticise the bandwagon of journalists and CC followers who frequently repeat Botsman's story of the power drill, yet fail to do their homework on what actually transpires in the CC world (e.g., Kessler, 2015; Hill, 2016). A dip into the literature and popular press reveals the narrative for Collaborative Consumption to be a murky one, weighed down by competing historical and contemporary ideologies. Its multifarious stories, written by an array of stakeholders with "fundamentally different rationales" (e.g., see **Figure 1.1** and **Figure 1.2**), make it an elusive term to define (Dredge & Gymiothy, 2015, p. 18).

**Figure 1.1** Competing Drivers of "Collaborative Consumption" (as introduced by Botsman, 2010).



**Figure 1.2** Competing Metaphors of the "Sharing Economy" (see Dredge & Gymiothy, 2015, p. 5).



Images originally retrieved in 2010 from <http://www.collaborativeconsumption.com/spreadables>; licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](#)

Botsman and Rogers (2010) claimed that CC does not have to follow or be an ideology in itself as “It demands no rigid dogma” (p. xxii). However, there are certain definitional parameters of CC which must be made transparent and considered for the reader before I continue. Thus, in an effort to define CC and frame the parameters I intend to cover for *this* story, I must address the most common disparities in the popular press and literature;<sup>6</sup> mainly: *Is Collaborative Consumption about (1) Access or Ownership? (2) Centralised or Dichotomous P2P exchange? (3) Market-mediated or Non-market-mediated exchange?*

### 1.1.1 Parameters of Collaborative Consumption: Access or Ownership?

Botsman and Rogers (2010) condensed CC into three different types (see **Table C.1** in Appendix for a list of websites): (1) **Product Service Systems** (sharing and renting systems – e.g., car sharing, toy libraries and Laundromats); (2) **Redistribution Markets** (redistributing unwanted goods to others – e.g., the typical garage sale has moved online with TradeMe and eBay; or swapping networks like SwapTree); and (3) **Collaborative Lifestyles** (exchanging time, money, space, and skills between peers – e.g., Time Banks, Airbnb and ParkAtMyHouse).

However, based on a mapping of 254 CC websites, Hamari et al., (2015) suggested categorising between transfer of access (which includes product service systems and collaborative lifestyles) and transfer of ownership (which includes redistribution markets). Following this suggestion would imply dropping “Collaborative Lifestyles”, so examples like Airbnb would go into the access category. This makes sense because Collaborative Lifestyle examples are all access-based consumption models. For example, Airbnb allows rental of rooms, ParkAtMyHouse allows the rental of driveways, and Time Banks allow access to other people’s services. I therefore agree with this re-classification but would still advise specifying between transferred intangible versus tangible goods (e.g., Schoenmueller, Fritz, & Bruhn, 2014; Vargo & Lusch, 2004). This is because providing a physical good is different from providing one’s home, driveway or time. Further, it is important to specify between types of goods as comparing the exchange for a power drill or a car would yield different behaviours and motivations.

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<sup>6</sup> The definitional parameters in the literature I discuss in Sections 1.1.1 through 1.1.3 are a part of my “non-committal literature review” (as discussed in Section 2.1) which was synthesised and formally written *after* this research had been completed... As the topics I was interested in (i.e., P2P renting and online swapping) fall under an umbrella term known as “Collaborative Consumption,” I include this review here in the introduction in order to define this movement and clarify the competing nomenclature around its parameters *for this thesis* (i.e., this allows me to “frame the problem” as well as show how my research fits in the bigger narrative of CC and how it will contribute to our knowledge).

For example, previous research on consumer disposition has cautioned that motivations for disposal fluctuate dramatically across product categories and that studies should therefore be product-specifically oriented (e.g., DeBell and Dardis, 1979; Shim, 1995). CC can therefore be conceptualised on two main continuums: (1) Durations (resistant, temporary, permanent)<sup>7</sup> and (2) Exchange offerings (tangible to intangible, cheap to expensive, everyday to luxury, etc).

Additionally, there has been confusion in the literature and popular press on access and ownership, with many scholars explicitly declaring (e.g., Barsius et al., 2012<sup>8</sup>; Catulli et al., 2013<sup>9</sup>; Chang, 2015<sup>10</sup>) or implicitly suggesting (e.g., Belk, 2015<sup>11</sup>) CC does not include transfers of ownership. I disagree with these assertions for two main reasons: (1) Ownership is ambiguous; and (2) CC is not *just* about access.

**Ownership is ambiguous.** The segregation of acquisition by material ownership versus access to an object's functionality is commonly taken because "transactions that do not involve a transfer of ownership are distinctively different from those that do" (Lovelock & Gummesson, 2004, p. 34). However, the differences between access and ownership are not always clear. For example, many studies use "the Burdens of Ownership" to distinguish between "Access" and "Ownership," (e.g., Berry & Maricle, 1973; Moeller & Wittkoswski, 2010), with some suggesting Takers only face "risks related to choosing between alternative services" (Lett, 2015, p. 3). However, research shows there are also burdens of access. Both acquisition choices put some degree of custodial responsibilities on the Taker (e.g., consider theories on stewardship – Davis, Schoorman & Donaldson, 1997).

For example, Jenkins et al. (2014) found borrowing can "produce a sense of burden, a desire or need to treat borrowed objects carefully" so "a form of restricted ownership emerges" where "the borrower becomes a 'guardian' of the item, taking responsibility for it, such that third parties might assume that it is owned by the borrower" (p. 135). However, they cautioned this level of care would

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<sup>7</sup> Durations of disposition and acquisition are defined further in Chapter Two (Literature Review).

<sup>8</sup> Barsius et al. (2012) stated that "with Collaborative Consumption, a possession (e.g., a holiday home) or part of a possession (e.g., a spare bedroom) is lent to another temporarily. Thus, collaborative sharing is polygamous but sequential. [...] In contrast to traditional sharing or Collaborative Consumption, acquiring the possession of another (Whether it is offered for sale or discarded) involves different people who have sole use of the entire possession sequentially: monogonous and sequential sharing" (p. 14).

<sup>9</sup> Catulli et al., (2013) listed a number of conflicting terms (including CC) and then stated that "All these labels describe a business model, as well as a mode of consumption that does not involve a transfer of ownership [emphasis added] of goods to consumers" (p. 186).

<sup>10</sup> Chang (2015) defined the collaborative economy as "an economic model that focuses on providing access to products and services through renting, trading, or sharing instead of traditional ownership" (p. 3).

<sup>11</sup> Belk (2015) did not explicitly say whether CC included transfers of ownership. However, he excluded gift giving from his definition with the reason that it "involves a transfer of ownership" which implies that his definition of CC only includes examples of market-mediated access (p. 204).



depend on the “strength or type of relationship to the lender” (p. 136). For example, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) found Zipcar users treated accessed cars with abuse rather than appropriated care because the access was usually short-term, anonymous, and mediated by a central company. However, when the rental good is owned by a visible peer (as in the case of CC), how does this alter the person-object relationship as well as affect the relationship between the Taker and Provider? It is not clear whether less anonymity fosters more guardianship and feelings of responsibility for Takers.

To better understand why ownership is ambiguous, it is also useful to think of *what it means to own*. Isaacs (1993) suggested owning a good “can only be thought of in terms of power – or rather, of powerlessness” (p. 225). For example, although a transfer of access may not involve a transfer of ownership, it *does* involve an extension of certain powers or “affordances” over an object (e.g., Norman, 2013) because ownership is essentially “a social arrangement that allows one certain rights to certain objects, and these social arrangements can change” (Mansfield, 2009, p. 7). Thus, there are varying degrees of power transferred in an exchange depending on the situational circumstances, the object, and the relationship between Provider and Taker.

Psychological ownership theories may also offer insight into this distinction. Psychological ownership explains the “state in which individuals feel as though the target of ownership (material or immaterial in nature) or a piece of that target is ‘theirs’” (Pierce, Kostova, and Dirks, 2003, p. 86). Although ownership may be physically transferred to a Taker, a Provider may still feel psychological ownership over the item. Similarly, although a Taker may legally “own” an item, there may be cases where they never experience feelings of ownership (e.g., McCracken, 1986). Alternatively, although a borrower does not technically hold ownership over a borrowed item, they may (depending on the type of object, interpersonal circumstances of who they are borrowing from, reciprocal expectations of the Provider, and how long they have access to the item) come to psychologically appropriate the item as their own – even if temporarily (e.g., Tinson & Nuttall, 2007; Jenkins, Molesworth, & Scullion, 2014). Pierce, Kostova, and Dirks (2001) suggested a longer association with a target (e.g., object) would “likely lead to perceptions of knowing the target better, and, as a result, to a sense of ownership” (p. 302). Further, Peck and Shu (2007) found consumers could develop a perception of ownership by touching and using objects. Thus, ownership is a “dual creation, part attitude, part object, part in the mind, part ‘real’” (Etzioni, 1991, p. 466).

Pierce, Kostova, and Dirks (2003) suggested three routes to psychological ownership: (1) Control over the item; (2) Intimate knowledge of the item; and/or (3) Investment of the self through experience with the item. Thus, herein resides the key distinction between legal and psychological ownership:

duration. A legal transfer of ownership occurs at the exact point of exchange; however psychological transfers of ownership have been argued to be “lengthy, dynamic and reiterative in nature” and thus may take up quite a bit of a consumer’s time (Pierce et al., 2003, p. 96). If any transfer of psychological ownership is to take place, a consumer must enact one (or more) of the three processes outlined above. Even after gaining a sense of psychological ownership, these feelings may dissipate over time. Thus, duration is relevant to the discussion of access *and* ownership. The literature is not clear how durations of ownership (psychologically, spatially or legally) are impacted by CC exchange compared to more traditional exchange. Thus, because the meaning of ownership is ambiguous, broadly using “ownership” to define CC does not fully capture what CC is *actually* about.

**CC is not just a shift from ownership to access.** (It’s about duration, flow, and scale of consumption). Another reason I disagree with the suggestion that “CC *doesn’t include transfers of ownership*” is because Botsman and Rogers’ (2010, p. 127) originating conception of CC included redistribution markets like eBay or Craigslist (where transactions entail ownership transfers). I see no reason why these examples should suddenly be excluded, as they entail an exchange which must be *collaborated* on by individual Providers and Takers, and nor has the inconsistent<sup>12</sup> literature justified this exclusion.

In 2013, Rachel Botsman recognised the growing disparity of definitions being used by CC stakeholders and attempted to create a shared and formal definition, saying CC can be defined as:

“An economic model based on sharing, swapping, trading, or renting products and services, enabling *access over ownership* [emphasis added]. It is reinventing not just what we consume but how we consume” (2013, paragraph 11).

Unfortunately, this recent definition of CC has only added to, rather than doused, the confusing flames of contradiction spreading through the literature. For example, after defining it to involve access rather than ownership, she provided a CC example of a redistribution market which “buys unwanted consignment-quality kids and women clothing and then resells it online, paying the supplier 40% of the resale value” – a clear example of transferred ownership (another reason why I include examples of ownership within my definition).

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<sup>12</sup> For example, swapping entails a transfer of ownership, and yet is still repeatedly included as an accepted CC example within CC studies which suggest CC does not include transfers of ownership.

I argue CC is *not* just a shift from ownership to access. This distinction instead belongs semantically to the terms “ownership-based consumption” shifting to “access-based consumption” (which describe a higher-level, broader distinction than CC). For example, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) defined access-based consumption as including “transactions that can be market-mediated but where no transfer of ownership takes place” (p. 1). This definition does not indicate whether it is collaborative, only whether it involves a transfer of ownership – thus access-based consumption can be traditional (B2C) or collaborative (P2P/C2C).

With this provision, I suggest CC is a phenomenon explaining the *flow* of goods (and services) in the second-hand world<sup>13</sup> between individual Providers and Takers. Considering “goods have both a use and an exchange value that extends well beyond the first cycle” (Gregson & Crewe, 2003, p. 2), where do these goods go after the first cycle? Ask anyone about CC and you’ll find quite a few people who believe CC is not new. “But people have been bartering and sharing for lifetimes, what’s so special about that?!” I’ve heard. Collectively, consumers *have* always engaged in some form of second-hand disposition or post-use exchange. So yes, many CC studies have essentially the same purpose as studies of second-hand cultures: “how and why goods come to be cast out, by whom, and in the process opened up to further cycles of consumption” (Gregson & Crewe, 2003, p. 6).

However, what makes CC a phenomenon worth revisiting is the *scale* of Providers, Takers, and goods becoming easier to find nearby with geolocation technologies and becoming amplified by P2P networks as more and more people become connected through the Internet in their everyday lives (e.g., Anderson & Rain; 2014; Gartner, 2013). For example, U.S. adult Internet usage has risen from 52% to 85% in the past fifteen years (Anderson & Perrin, 2015), while U.S. adults using smartphones with geolocation based services (i.e., apps and websites enabling users to: “Find a product/service near me”) rose from 55% in May 2011 to 74% in February 2012 (Zickuhr, 2012). The CC groundswell is not just about technology growth or alternative exchange, rather it is about the vast amount of people becoming more aware and having access to such technologies which make it possible for commodities and services to be ubiquitously accessible on the digital market. Subsequently, CC is about what people are *doing with these networks*.

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13 Although I have chosen to use the terminology of “second-hand world” to describe the type of CC websites I am most interested in, I also acknowledge in my definition that CC on a broader level is essentially a type of second-order marketing system (e.g., O’Reilly et al., 1984) which includes services and other types of intangible offerings as well. Using this terminology makes the distinction is that peers exist on a second-level of consumption whereas centralised powers exist as a common first-level of distribution. This is discussed further in Section 1.1.2).

This rising usage and subsequent ubiquity of P2P technologies has shifted the way we *can* engage in second-hand disposition and acquisition.<sup>14</sup> For example, because the convenience of storage often exceeds the hassle of disposal, consumers have often been more likely to “keep the product” (Jacoby, Berning & Dietvorst, 1977, p. 22) or throw it away rather than find alternative disposition options (e.g., Albinsson & Perera, 2009; Coulter & Ligas, 2003; Domina & Koch, 1998). Likewise, because the convenience of purchasing new items from a store often exceeds the hassle of finding second-hand items (e.g., Gregson & Crewe, 2003), consumers may be more likely to choose first-hand acquisition options rather than search for items in the second-hand world. As disposition becomes easier, more integrated with social media, and thus less anonymous, consumers may become more willing to engage in casting out their possessions sooner and more often – which can also make the secondary acquisition of goods more appealing (i.e., a greater variety of items/services to access and more ways to get access to items/services).

In this sense, CC can disrupt the traditional *duration* of acquisition, ownership and disposition – *which may be why access has been a prominent CC theme*, **because ownership becomes less permanent when consumers cast out their possessions more often**. For example, the literature suggests a major obstacle for successful CC ventures is the fact that most consumers prefer “ownership” (e.g., Gullstrand Edbring et al., 2015). Many studies agree this desire for ownership is an impediment to *access-based acquisition*. However, it can also be a deterrent to collaborative *disposition*. If consumers find it too difficult to give up their objects for others’ access or ownership, then they will continue engaging in permanent ownership of their previously acquired possessions and “not move things along” (i.e., resistant disposition, see Section 2.3). Thus, the potential rise of reuse and redistribution of objects changes the traditional experience of “ownership” (Nissanoff, 2007).

Although swapping entails a permanent transfer of ownership, it may also be looked at as a form of access when ownership of the object becomes less enduring and more transient and cyclical (i.e., for swappers who continually reswap their items). Even ownership transfers on eBay can disrupt linear buying and selling when consumers engage in “planned resales after temporary use” – where resellers are “more interested in using the product on a trial basis” rather than as a final purchase for ownership (Murphy & Liao, 2013, p. 193). In this sense, the objective of CC may be to acquire more liquid access and possession over goods, rather than holding onto them as solid extensions of our self or legacy (e.g.,

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14 Also included in my CC definition are cases of re-invented “production” and “creation,” which for the purposes of this study are beyond the scope of discussion. Briefly, examples may include individuals creating physical goods for second-hand exchange (consider Etsy), as well as digital goods (consider Wikipedia and YouTube). I argue that these are “second-hand” because they are created at the second-level (by individual consumers rather than commercially).

Belk, 1988; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). Thus, redistribution in the second-hand world allows consumers to engage in “the continuous replacement of our personal possessions” through collaboration with other consumers (Nissanoff, 2007, p. 7).

Gregson and Crewe (2003) found consumers who engaged in second-hand acquisition through car-boot sales (i.e., offline setting) had to “think hard” and “know the possibilities of place/s, and to be aware of where and when transient events like car-boot sales and jumble sales occur” (p. 107). Their findings painted a picture of an offline second-hand culture which was marginally “hard work.” However, with an increase of options for outlets of disposition and reacquisition, it has become easier to connect Providers and Takers and reduce this knowledge-action gap of having to seek out alternative consumption choices (e.g., Yates, 2008; Luchs et al., 2011). With reinvented ways to keep track of Providers and Takers after an exchange, it has become more feasible to consider temporary access between peers rather than just permanent ownership. However, instead of focusing *only* on the shift from ownership to access, I suggest framing the definition of CC more broadly so it covers all second-hand consumption approaches (i.e., looking more closely at how a consumer uses their previously acquired goods<sup>15</sup> through processes of disposition).

CC websites provide new outlets for *disposition* at lower costs – instead of taking an unwanted couch to the dump (and having to pay to dispose of it) a consumer can now find a willing Taker on a website such as Freecycle to come and pick it up at their convenience, and instead of having to advertise in the paper or on nearby billboards, all it takes are a few clicks. Instead of lamenting over a power drill’s wasted capacity, a consumer can find a willing renter on a website such as Zilok to use it for an agreed upon fee. Additionally, CC websites provide new outlets for *second-hand acquisition* at lower costs – instead of buying a dress at a store, a consumer can find someone with their desired dress who is willing to do a trade on a website such as Rehash. Thus, I argue that CC describes resource allocation systems which allow the redistribution of “used” physical objects, spaces, services, and digital goods between individual Providers and Takers.

The duration of redistribution can fall on a *continuum* of disposition-acquisition which is temporary (e.g., transfer of access) or permanent (e.g., transfer of ownership). This notion that CC makes exchange easier in the second-hand world aligns with Botsman and Rogers’ (2010, p. 24) belief that CC represents “a system activating the untapped resources of assets through models and

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15 CC also includes the exchange of intangibles (e.g. space, money, skills), but as I have only focused my thesis on the exchange of tangible household goods, these instances are not discussed.

marketplaces that enable greater efficiency.” In this way, the second-hand world has the potential to become more transparent and mainstream so desired Providers and Takers don’t have to be “in the know.” Although good bargains and unique items still need to be “found,” increased efficiency allows CC users to be more purposeful in the second-hand market rather than only resort “to aimless wandering, waiting for a coincidence, an almost magical encounter of diffuse desire with an object” (Chantelat & Vignal, 2005, p. S77).

### 1.1.2 Parameters of Collaborative Consumption: Centralised or P2P?

Botsman and Rogers’ original CC classification included examples guided by a centralised community such as Netflix, Zipcar or RentTheRunway (where the objects are owned and provided by a business rather than by private individuals). In centralised communities, all of the users are Takers from a central entity as opposed to peer-to-peer communities, which entail the collaborative efforts of both individual Providers and Takers engendering the exchange. Further, pure centralised consumption does not utilise the untapped resources of individual Providers – it only encourages more efficient consumption for Takers.<sup>16</sup>

For this reason, I believe only communities which offer dichotomous peer-to-peer consumption<sup>17</sup> should belong in the definition of CC (thus making CC about C2C exchange) because for this type of consumption to endure, peers have to collaborate on the creation and execution of exchange rather than relying on a central body. This recommendation would be supported by Botsman’s (2013) more recent definition of the collaborative economy:

“An economy built on distributed networks of *connected individuals and communities versus centralized institutions* [emphasis added], transforming how we can produce, consume, finance and learn” (paragraph 6).

Unfortunately, Botsman’s (2013) definition had inconsistencies. For example, after her definition of the collaborative economy, she provided CC examples of *centralised* product service systems (BMW’s “Drive Now” and Netflix) rather than only P2P communities.

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<sup>16</sup> Thus, here I agree with Chang’s (2015) suggestion that in theory, “anyone can participate” in a collaborative economy (as long as they are not structurally constrained).

<sup>17</sup> Either exclusively or in addition to centralised offerings.

Going by Botsman's (2013) definition of the collaborative economy, I think a more logical follow-up would be that CC involves consumption which takes place within a collaborative economy (thus making it the result of C2C/P2P exchange). This supports Brian Chesky's (the founder of Airbnb) prediction that "peer-to-peer is going to become the default way people exchange things, whether it is space, stuff, skills, or services" (Botsman & Rogers, 2010, p. xiv) as well as Botsman's original (2010) TED talk on the subject which focused heavily on trust between strangers (i.e., peers):

"We are moving from passive consumers to creators, to highly enabled *collaborators*. What's happening is the Internet is removing the middleman, so that anyone [...] can make a living selling *peer-to-peer*" (Botsman, 2010, no pagination).

There has also been discord within the literature over this topic – with some scholars placing both B2C and C2C exchange within their conceptualisation of CC (e.g., Belk, 2014; Möhlmann, 2015) – and others placing it only within the C2C realm – for example, Hamari et al. (2015) defined CC "as the *peer-to-peer based activity* [emphasis added] of obtaining, giving, or sharing access to goods and services, coordinated through community-based online services" (p. 3) – and still others have described hybrid models which include both C2C as well as B2C interactions (e.g., Scaraboto, 2015). Bucynski (2013) argued that sharing systems owned by centralised powers resemble a typical business exchange,<sup>18</sup> but when the system is owned by peers pooling their resources together, the required collaboration makes it resemble a distinctive socioeconomic groundswell ripe for exploration.

When I refer to CC, I am describing a collaborative economy<sup>19</sup> (see Botsman, 2013, paragraph 6) of online systems that foster exchange which is driven and collaborated by individual *peers* (Providers and Takers). With renting, this type of exchange can also be categorised under the "peer-to-peer rental, central transfer" mechanism class described by Hill and Wellman (2012, pp. 3-4) where the transfer of goods is facilitated by a CC website but the actual transaction occurs between Provider and Taker. CC websites are therefore part of "Web 2.0," where anyone can "contribute with content and connect with each other" (Carroll & Romano, 2010, p. 190), and mirrors the freedoms claimed by eBay: "It's the market that sets the price, the market that rates sellers for reliability, and the market – with only rare instances of intervention – that determines what's too controversial to be sold" (Klein, 2010, p. 18).

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18 Thus, these types of websites that call themselves part of the CC sharing economy may be considered as "pseudo sharing – a wolf in sheeps'-clothing" because they "present themselves in the guise of sharing" but only resemble a commercial business exchange from the first-level of consumption (Belk, 2013, p. 7).

19 Stokes, Clarence, and Rinne (2014) similarly define a collaborative economy as the use of "internet technologies to connect distributed groups of people to make better use of skills, goods, and other useful things" (p. 10).

Thus, CC attempts to put the power of markets back in the collective hands of individual consumers as peers rather than centralised powers (e.g., Pitt et al., 2002; Urban, 2002).

### 1.1.3 Parameters of Collaborative Consumption: **Market-Mediated or Non-Market Mediated?**

Belk (2015) suggested that Botsman and Rogers' (2010) original conception of CC was too broad because it included marketplace exchange (pseudo-sharing for compensation) as well as non-market exchange (sharing without compensation). Belk (2015) used Couchsurfing as an example, saying it should not apply because it involved peers providing other peers a place to stay for free, and therefore supposedly non-reciprocal. I do not agree that just because "for free" disposition is not market-mediated it should be erased from the definition. Indeed many studies suggest reciprocity is not entirely clear when it comes to comparing modes of market mediation.

Although the transaction may not come with an *explicit* compensation, there are still marketplace expectations which would not occur in offline sharing between friends or neighbours. For example, Couchsurfers are expected to provide their host with an online review for their services. This gives them a rating so future "Takers" are enticed to stay with them. Providers may expect varying degrees of compensation even if it is not explicitly required, especially when the Takers are strangers. Couchsurfing hosts can choose to refuse or accept guests based on their profiles, reviews, or online communication. If they are hosting with the hope of receiving a small gift as repayment (e.g., Bialski, 2011), then they may pick and choose guests who have reviews thanking them for gifts. If they are hosting in the hope of receiving entertaining communication, they may pick and choose guests who have reviews for being amusing and engaging. In addition, Couchsurfer Providers expect that when they need a couch to sleep on, other Providers will be willing to provide them a bed, a form of balanced exchange (e.g., Bagozzi, 1975).

Regardless of whether Couchsurfing explicitly prohibits compensation (Belk, 2014), *some* form of reciprocity or collaborative effort for exchange is always taking place, as "all forms of digital sharing involve degrees of reciprocity" (Cammaerts, 2011, p. 47). For example, Lauterbach et al. (2009) found direct reciprocity (where the Taker later returns the favour and becomes Provider to their previous host) *has* occurred within Couchsurfing transactions – indicating a possible shift from generalised to balanced reciprocity over time. Similarly, websites like Freecycle where people offer their goods for free could be argued as being mediated by the service of Takers picking up their items, saving



Providers the effort and cost of taking their unwanted items to the dump. Moreover, Geiger and Germelmann (2015) found Couchsurfers in their study “were disappointed or even felt exploited when they did not get anything in return” (p. 6). Recent studies on Freecycle and Couchsurfing (Foden, 2015; Harvey, Smith, & Golightly, 2014) also found evidence of Providers exhibiting power relations (typically associated with market-mediated exchange) to choose which Taker should receive their goods. For example, Providers have discriminated potential Takers based on their time availability for picking up the item, their speed and quality of communication, politeness, moral assessments, or even with whomever they most easily identified based on their personal profiles and reviews (e.g., Germann Molz, 2013; Lauterbach et al., 2009).

Of course, providing an item for free is different from providing for some compensation, as Benkler (2004, p. 311) argued “social norms may shift around entitlements.” I therefore agree it is important to specify the type of Provider mechanism (types of compensation and levels of reciprocity driving the system) when discussing CC examples. However, from my research on P2P renting and swapping websites, I found a few instances where trying to separate what Belk (2015) called market-mediated and non-market-mediated networks was not always possible because Providers could offer their goods in a range of all options – for free, for trade, to share, or for rent. These were not separated on the website under different sections so the type of Provider mechanism was unclear.

Further, many scholars suggest the ambiguous dichotomisation of commodity versus gift exchange is problematic (e.g., Appadurai, 1986; Geertz, 1978; Gollnhofer, Hellwig, & Morhart, 2015; Tsing, 2013). This may be especially the case for the exchange of second-hand goods embedded in social networks (as opposed to B2C first cycle exchange) because they allow users to engage with the biography of an object. In other words, second-hand goods may be valued by “prior circulation and social entanglement, [...], combining elements of both the commodity form and the gift form” (Appelgren & Bohlin, 2015, p. 156). Thus, CC exchange can essentially transform sharing of possessions into a “hybridised” exchange of commodities (Dobscha & Arsel, 2011) and this exchange can fall on a spectrum where Providers engage in networked disposition for money – for other goods or services – and/or for free.

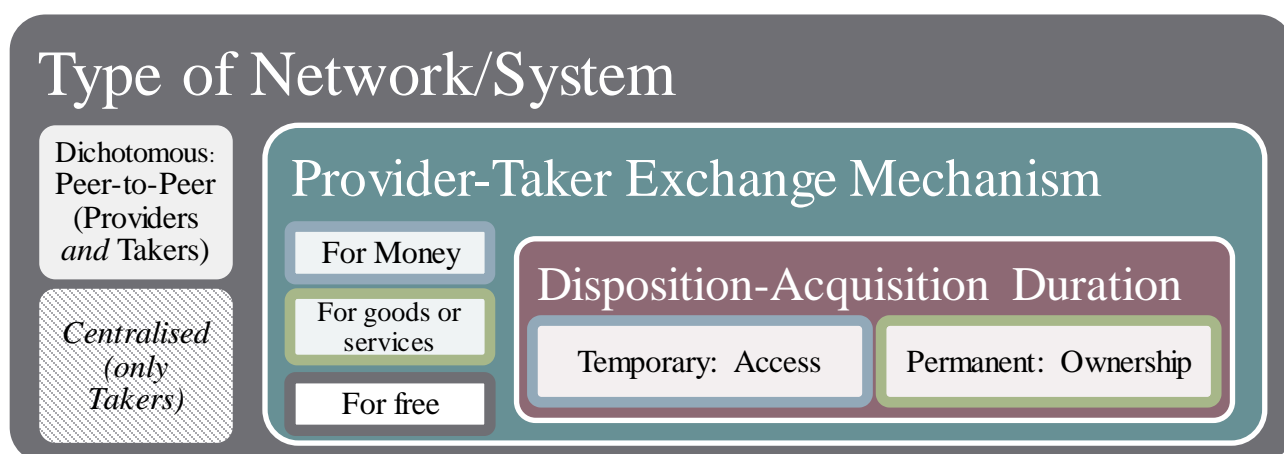
**In conclusion, I define Collaborative Consumption** as consumption that occurs through an online/mobile network, system, or intermediary<sup>20</sup> that facilitates the act and process of

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<sup>20</sup> I acknowledge that there is opportunity to debate whether “Collaborative Consumption” must be initiated or facilitated by technology/intermediaries. However, this is not a common note of consternation or disagreement in the literature, so I have pragmatically chosen to avoid wandering onto this definitional path. Overall, the vast majority of the literature

private individuals *providing* to others and/or the act and process of *taking* something from other private individuals.<sup>21</sup> Mechanisms for the exchange can fall somewhere on a continuum of market-based mechanisms in which individuals provide for free, for other goods<sup>22</sup> or services, or for money (with the latter two options usually being denoted as market-based exchange and the first non-market-based). Further, disposition and acquisition rests on a continuum of duration, where individuals can provide temporarily or permanently. This definition is summarised in **Figure 1.3**.

**Figure 1.3** Collaborative Consumption Definitive Dimensions.



CC is essentially a part of the informal/alternative economy (e.g., McCrohan et al., 1991). Although traditionally thought of as marginalised and insignificant (e.g., ignored by retailers as a valid threat of competition, overlooked by government for taxes, doubted by environmentalists for easing wasteful consumerism), CC has been cleverly repackaged (Dredge & Gymiothy, 2015) and its residence in the ubiquitous market of social media has made people take notice of its potential significance. This concludes the background of my research topic and the importance of furthering our knowledge of peer-to-peer consumption through collaborative disposition and reacquisition. Next, I give an overview of the specific research topics this thesis will cover.

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places technological aspects (the internet, social networks and Web 2.0) as a major component of understanding the CC discourse (e.g., John, 2013a, p. 6; Richardson, 2015; Schor et al., 2015, p. 14). Further, Dredge and Gyimothy (2015) insightfully highlighted that Botsman and Rogers' (2010) and Botsman's (2014) definitions of CC stressed the importance of consumption becoming activated by a developing market *system*. Further, the fact that CC often uses the terminology and metaphor of "Peer to Peer" reveals its connection to the Internet because P2P refers to computer networks (see John, 2013a, p. 15) and show how CC is often "facilitated by an external provider" like online websites (Mohlmann, 2015, p. 2). Finally, my research boundaries encompass consumption only facilitated by online intermediaries/networks, so this debate is not relevant for telling my story.

<sup>21</sup> Thus, CC entails collaborative *consumer behaviour* (i.e., acquisition, consumption, and disposition) between peers.

<sup>22</sup> When it comes to exchanging goods, CC encompasses consumption cycles (Prothero et al., 2011) where "the reacquisition of discarded objects reshapes linear consumption into a cycle" (Brosius et al., 2012, p. 1).

## 1.2 Research Overview

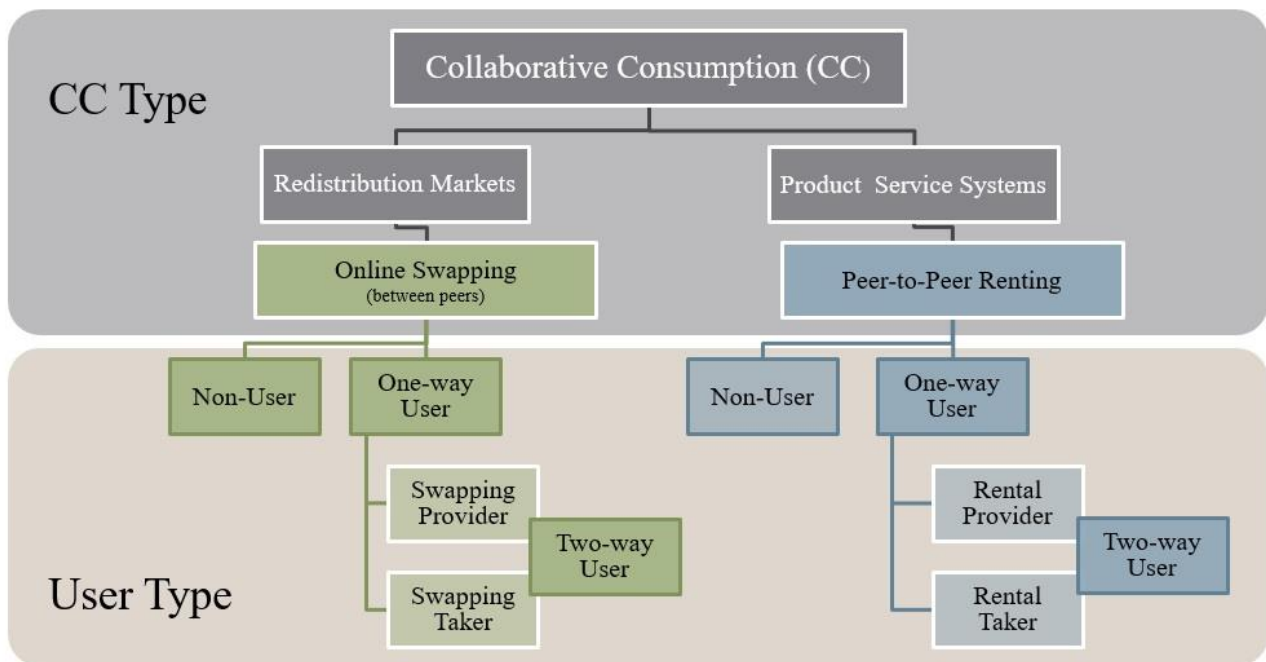
After reading Botsman and Rogers' (2010) book, I was specifically interested in exploring two types of Collaborative Consumption: "Product Service Systems" and "Redistribution Markets." In particular, two CC subtypes were chosen for investigation:

- (1) Online swapping, where individuals swap items online as a form of moneyless exchange; and
- (2) Peer-to-Peer (P2P) renting, where individual Providers find Takers online who wish to rent their items for an agreed upon rental fee and specified time.

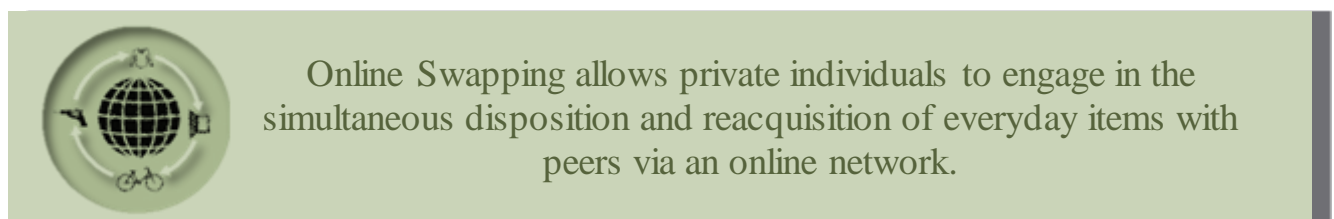
These CC cases were chosen because they were the "novel" examples used in Botsman's TED talk which had most piqued my curiosity, and as evidenced in the following sections (1.2.1 and 1.2.2), they represent a gap in our extant knowledge. There has yet to be an established body of literature covering temporary or permanent acquisition/disposition of goods in the context of swapping or renting between peers online.

There is also a gap in the literature when it comes to comparing Provider-Taker dynamics beyond the literature of Economics (e.g., "two-sided markets" – see Rysman, 2009). I was therefore interested in comparing user types to distinguish disposition-acquisition motivations and experiences. This buyer-seller malleability (Siddiqui & Turley, 2006) was explored via three user types: (1) Two-way users (Takers and Providers), (2) One-way users (Takers or Providers), and (3) Non-users (those who had not yet participated in a transaction but were members of a P2P rental or online swapping website). Although CC research has sometimes distinguished between Providers and Takers, Durif et al. (2014) argued second-hand consumption has primarily been researched from a Taker perspective of motivations and deterrents to *buy* (e.g., Razzouk & Gourley, 1982; Roux & Guiot, 2008). Research has recently taken notice of the Provider perspective; however, these have primarily focused on Permanent Disposition through selling (e.g., Durif et al., 2014; Lemaitre & de Barnier, 2013; Murphy & Liao, 2013) and giving for free (e.g., Guillard & Bucchia, 2012a; Nelson & Rademacher, 2009), rather than swapping or renting.

These CC types and user types are illustrated in **Figure 1.4** and discussed in the next three sections.

**Figure 1.4** Research Topics Overview.

### 1.2.1 CC Type: “Redistribution Markets” (Online Swapping)



Redistribution markets allow consumers to engage in “the continuous replacement of our personal possessions” through collaboration with other consumers (Nissanoff, 2007, 7). Such markets have been explored for physical formats such as swap meets (e.g., Belk, Sherry, & Wallendorf, 1988), garage sales (e.g., Soiffer & Herrmann, 1987), car boot sales (e.g., Crewe & Gregson, 1998; Gregson & Crewe, 1998), and flea markets (e.g., Maisel, 1974; Sherry, 1990). However, it is unclear how moving second-hand consumption between known peers to an online community of anonymous peers impacts consumer motivations, experiences, or evaluations. Although there have been numerous studies on Consumer-to-Consumer (C2C) auctions (e.g., Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2009), and some focus on free exchange networks such as Freecycle.org (e.g., Nelson, Rademacher, & Paek, 2007), other emerging CC network channels have so far been neglected (Albinsson & Perera, 2009; 2012; Ji et al., 2009).

This thesis explores one type of CC redistribution market that has yet to be saturated in the literature, Online Swapping,<sup>23</sup> which I define as an exchange whereby one individual trades their physical possessions for the physical possessions of another individual as mediated by technology. Swapping comes in two major forms (e.g., Oh, 1989; Rice, 2003): (1) Direct swapping – a consumer swaps their good directly with another consumer's good; and (2) Indirect swapping – a consumer provides their good to another consumer and in exchange they get an intermediary good (sometimes in the form of a virtual point) which they can then use to swap for a good they want from someone else. Although I first attempted to study only direct swapping, I found many of the respondents used more than one type of swapping website. Therefore, this research looked at both forms of swapping exchange.

Swapping has usually been examined under the term bartering, a moneyless market exchange that escapes the confines of currency as numeraire (Dalton, 1982). Unlike monetary exchange, where one of the traded objects (money) has no intrinsic value but is predetermined by a governmental authority as legal tender (Simmel, 1978), the bartering economy involves exchange determined by a trader's interest in an object, where the traded object's value is incomparable and instead requires a 'double coincidence of wants' (Jevons, 1875). For example, a prospective provider of a drill who seeks a ladder not only needs to find a provider with a spare ladder, but one who is also seeking a drill at that exact time. For this reason, direct bartering (Oh, 1989; Rice, 2003) is associated with inefficiency (e.g., Banerjee & Maskin, 1996), as finding the needed trader and coming to an agreed upon exchange can become difficult. With online broker networks, potential barter customers are able to make their products and wants available across a greater number of interested parties by reducing the social and geographical distance between peers.

Swapping studies have primarily focused on macroeconomics and inter-firm bartering (e.g., Kaikati & Kaikati, 2013; Mardak, 2002; Oliver & Mpiganjira, 2011), rather than between private individuals. As economic theory assumes consumers would rather trade for cash than for goods (Magenheim & Murrell, 1988), swapping disposition has failed to be a central focus of consumer studies and dismissed as unstructured and insignificant to the economy (e.g., Dalton, 1982; Marvasti & Smyth, 1998). Further, C2C bartering has often been seen as a recreational activity for hobbyists (e.g., trading collectibles such as beanie babies or Pokémon cards) rather than an alternative for traditional acquisition or redistribution (Jowanza, 2011).


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<sup>23</sup> A brief overview and list of online swapping websites can be found in Appendix C.2.

However, barter trade is said to be on the rise (e.g., Rice, 2003; Spitznagel, 2012), and studies of swapping between individual peers have been slowly appearing in the last few years. For example, since my research has concluded, researchers have provided an empirical investigation of online bartering motivations (Lee, Chen, & Hung, 2014), an exploratory study on the motivations for swapping clothing (Matthews & Hodge, 2014), a netnographic exploration of online swapping websites (Arsel, 2009), a review of reciprocity within barter markets (Ye, 2013), an investigation of online barter markets as transactional versus relational forms of exchange (Ye, Viswanathan, & Hann, 2014), and an empirical investigation of online barter markets for books (Ye, Viswanathan, & Hann, 2016). However, the coverage on this behaviour still remains under-investigated in the literature. Further, organically formed second-hand networks on P2P created websites (e.g., Pinterest, Reddit, and Facebook) have been ignored by researchers (Tovianen, 2015), which is surprising when considering the innumerable online pages devoted to swapping exchange.

With more swapping options available to consumers, I believe swapping between individuals may have more insight to offer and thus has become a behaviour worthy of research focus. Therefore, this thesis differs from past research by exploring swapping between *private individuals* facilitated *online*.

### 1.2.2 CC Type: “Product Service Systems” (Peer-to-Peer Renting)



Peer-to-Peer (P2P) Renting can be defined as “an exchange whereby one individual makes available their physical possessions temporarily to another individual for a rental fee in order to meet the temporary needs of the renter without a transfer of ownership” (Philip, Ozanne, & Ballantine, 2015, p. 1311).

Renting and sharing networks have often been examined under the umbrella of usage-oriented Product Service Systems (PSS) as a way to consume more sustainably by extending the intensity of product use (Behrendt et al., 2003; Hirschl, Konrad, & Scholl, 2003; Tukker, 2004). This concept stems from a couple of economic directions – a shift from commodity and product exchange to functional service exchange (e.g., Stahel, 1997) and a dematerialising of the economy (e.g., Boer, 1998). The functional economy categorises products as assets rather than liabilities and consumables, where the function of the product is sold rather than the product itself (e.g., rather than buy a book, buy the story).

PSS research has traditionally explored various forms of commercial renting, where organisations rent to consumers (e.g., car, movie, hotels, rentals), but the advent of online social networks allows exchange to expand to the peer-to-peer sector (e.g., Belk, 2014; Geron, 2013). Hill and Wellman (2012) contributed to the topic of P2P rental of goods under the lens of game theory, however most papers continue to focus on car/accommodation rentals or B2C access-based consumption (e.g., Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). There is a gap in the literature when it comes to renting between private individuals who can temporarily acquire goods, as well as temporarily dispose of their possessions. This thesis therefore sets to explore an understudied form of usage-oriented PSS, Peer-to-Peer (P2P) renting, which occurs when private individuals engage in temporary disposition and/or temporary reacquisition of everyday items with peers via an online rental network.

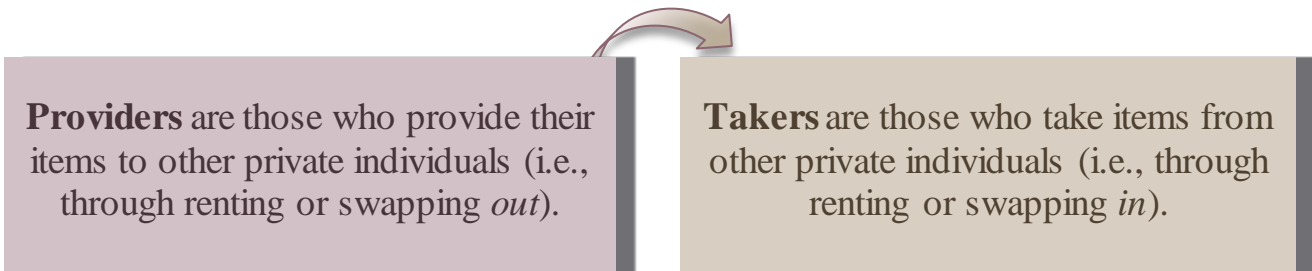
Lovelock and Gummesson (2004) suggested temporary disposition offered “scholars a new lens through which to observe marketplace activity” (p. 35). Temporary disposition has been frequently overlooked in consumer behaviour studies (e.g., Laitala, 2014), with research mostly focusing on permanent disposition (e.g., Albinsson & Perera, 2012). As research indicates consumers rarely consider renting out or loaning their belongings compared to more permanent disposal options (Jacoby, Berning, & Dietvorst, 1977), it is not surprising temporary disposition has been neglected. Further, renters have often been perceived as flawed consumers (Cheshire, Walters, & Rosenblatt, 2010), and permanent acquisition practices such as ownership and possession have been the central focus of consumer research (e.g., Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Carvalho et al., 2011; Durgee & O’Connor, 1995).

Temporary acquisition is also an understudied topic compared to traditional ownership, but its occurrence surpasses temporary disposition because the act of renting is not as foreign to consumers as the idea of providing items to rent out. For example, consider laundromats, movie rentals, car rentals, room and home rentals, designer clothing rentals, and even toy rentals. However, these well-known examples exist predominantly in the commercial realm (B2C) rather than operating in the P2P arena. Renting something from an individual stranger is unheard of, or at least uncommon. Although there may be instances of borrowing from neighbours for free (or as a favour that may be reciprocated), this research looks at CC as a way to leverage commodity exchange. Thus, this research was limited to examples which held some form of explicit mutual exchange because it was unclear why or how likely consumers would be willing to rent from strangers with money involved. I therefore set out to examine the nature of both temporary acquisition and disposition behaviour in the context of websites facilitating rentals between peers.<sup>24</sup>

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24 A brief overview and list of P2P renting websites can be found in Appendix C.1.

### 1.2.3 User Type: Providers, Takers, and Non-Users



Numerous studies have solely focused on disposition (e.g., Jacoby et al., 1977; Cherrier, 2009; Arsel & Dobscha, 2011), acquisition (e.g., Kasulis, Lusch, & Stafford, 1979), or non-usership (e.g., Selwyn, 2003; Wyatt, Thomas, & Terranova, 2002), but I have attempted to explore these activities concurrently. Some people may only choose to list items (Providers engaging in disposition), while others may choose only to browse for items (Takers engaging in acquisition), while others may undertake both behaviours (two-way users) – and still others may have not engaged with the website at all after signing up (non-users). For swapping, these lines are more blurred (a barter exchange entails simultaneous disposition and acquisition). However, I predicted swapping respondents could potentially have latent tendencies where some users may have been motivated to *dispose* of things while others may have preferred swapping as a way to *acquire* things. This could also be exhibited in a continuum of actions – Providers who were only interested in disposition might not browse for items to initiate a swap – they may instead wait until a Taker finds their items and makes an inquiry to swap.

Matzner, Chasin, and Todenhofer (2015) also looked at the simultaneous role of Providers and Takers in CC exchange. However, instead of Taker they used the term “User.”<sup>25</sup> While I agree Takers may be argued as “users” because they are “using” the provided resource, I also maintain consumers do not always use acquired items. For example, I’ve rented DVDs before but never had a chance to watch them before bringing them back, so although the object was transferred to me temporarily I never accessed its usage value. Likewise, with swapping, users may swap for an item and never access its usage if it turns out to be something they didn’t want after all.

I also chose to use the term Taker to avoid confusion with Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) studies which define users as peers signed up to a website (e.g., Hassenzahl & Tractinsky, 2006). With this lens, using the term user is too broad because it encompasses both types of usage (both Provider

<sup>25</sup> Botsman and Rogers (2010) also used the terms “user” and “provider.”



and Taker activities). In hindsight to my research definitions,<sup>26</sup> I found another study which looked at the concurrent role of Providers and Takers in CC exchange, using the exact terminology and definitions I had proposed: “As a taker, someone can buy, rent, swap or receive a product or service. As a provider, someone can sell, rent out, swap or give a product or service” (van de Glind, 2013, p. 33). This concludes the main topics of my research. I now turn to the research questions which guided this thesis.

## 1.2.4 Research Questions and Significance

When I began studying peer-to-peer renting in 2010 (see Philip, Ballantine, & Ozanne, 2012; Philip, Ozanne, & Ballantine, 2015), attention to small-scale household rental and swapping exchange was relatively sparse, if not highly neglected.<sup>27</sup> My perusal through the literature for studies on *peer-to-peer*<sup>28</sup> renting or swapping yielded nothing beyond physical swap meets (e.g., Belk et al., 1988), P2P renting of cars (e.g., Hampshire, 2011) accommodation (e.g., Lauterbach et al., 2009), bike sharing (e.g., Shaheen, Guzman, & Zhang, 2010), toy sharing (e.g., Ozanne & Ballantine, 2010), and renting from businesses (e.g., Mont, 2002). As far as I can pinpoint, P2P renting websites had only started to appear as early as 2006 (e.g., Loanables.com) so this was not surprising. However, swapping had been occurring online since nearly the time of eBay (e.g., MakeupAlley.com had facilitated swaps between users as early as 1999) so the limited literature was unexpected. As discussed in the previous sections, to the best of my knowledge, there were no studies at the onset of my research (between 2010 and 2012) which had looked at P2P renting of tangible everyday goods<sup>29</sup> and there were only a few exploratory studies that had looked at online swapping websites (e.g., Arsel, 2009).

I was therefore left with a blank slate for exploring the experiences of online renting and swapping between peers – which led to an exploratory focus rather than filling a particular gap in the literature. Thus, the initial qualitative phase of this study followed a grounded theory methodology which aimed

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26 Sundararajan (2014, p. 2) also distinguished between **entrepreneurs**, “individuals or small businesses that supply goods and services” and **consumers**, “individuals who demand: buy, rent, consume,” where both consumers and entrepreneurs are peers using CC **platforms**. However, “entrepreneur” implies that the Provider is motivated by profit, which does not fit the CC examples guided by altruism and sharing. However, their distinction between demand and supply fits into my separation of Providers – those who supply and provide, and Takers – those who demand and take.

27 This was not surprising as P2P renting and swapping websites were not popularised to the wider public until Botsman and Rogers (2010) introduced Collaborative Consumption.

28 The extant literature on renting and swapping mostly covered the contexts of B2C or B2B.

29 With the exception of a recent case study which explored a P2P renting website in the UK called “Ecomodo” (Piscielli, Cooper, & Fisher, 2015) which was published after my research and analysis had been completed.

to answer “What do we have here?” (Stern, 1994, p. 220). More specifically, I set out to explore the following primary research questions (as adapted from Goulding, 2002, p. 105):

**Question 1:** What is the nature of the experience derived from online swapping and P2P renting; and how do these experiences differ between (a) user-types (Providers, Takers, and Non-Users) and (b) CC types (online swapping, P2P renting)?

**Question 2:** What are the motivating and deterring factors behind online swapping and P2P renting; and how do these motivations and deterrents differ between user-types and CC types?

Building upon these primary research questions a minor research question arose from my chosen Theoretical Perspective of Pragmatism (see Section 3.3.1), and transformative consumer research (TCR), which attempts to improve consumers’ welfare (e.g., Carrington, Black, & Newholm, 2012; Mick, 2012) – in this case through promoting environmentally and socially responsible behaviour.<sup>30</sup> Pragmatists conduct research to benefit the users and nonusers (or any involved stakeholders) of a chosen phenomenon. In that vein, this research also explored the following secondary research question:

**Question 3:** What are some enabling factors that might make these CC systems more appealing?

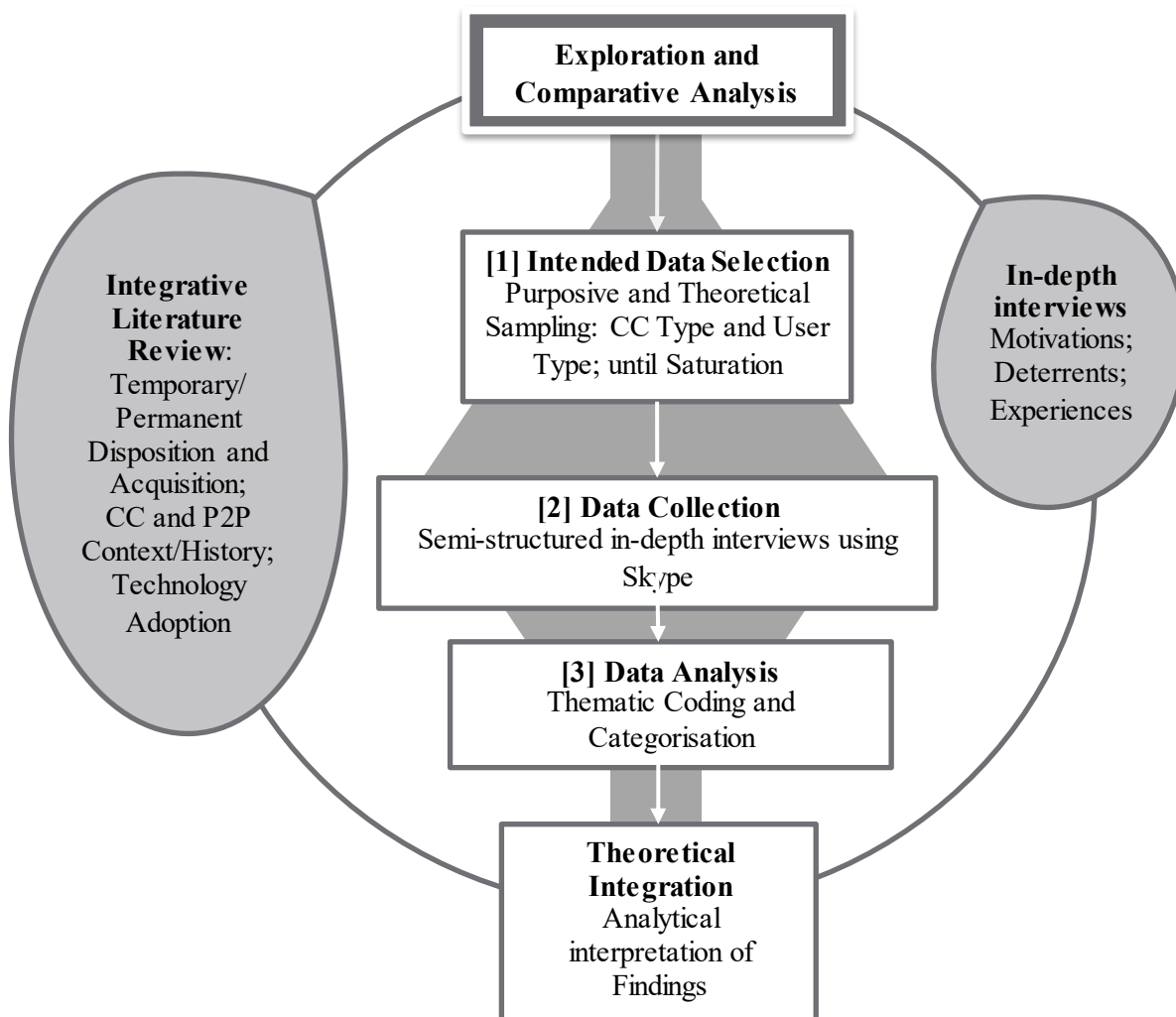
From this question I hoped to advance implications for managers and developers of CC websites. Understanding CC experiences could help with the development of P2P websites: how to build trust between strangers, keep customers engaged in the community, and bestow consumers with an enduring involvement with the website and exchange process itself. This final question therefore addresses an important goal of grounded theory, which is to be “relevant and problematic for those involved” (Glaser, 1978, p. 93).

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<sup>30</sup> Collaborative Consumption has been argued to hold the potential for improving: (1) Ecological Sustainability (i.e., through decreasing production, consuming more efficiently, and disposing more ecologically); (2) Economic Sustainability (i.e., by definition, CC is reinventing economic models with advances in social media and technology, so taking advantage of idling capacity, opportunities for consumer entrepreneurship (e.g., Shah & Trispas, 2007), and employment in new markets arise); and (3) Social Sustainability (i.e., consider that access over ownership veers away from materialism, an individual tendency that has been known to become embedded in social disorders (Maier, 2005), non-generosity, envy, and consumer unhappiness (Belk, 1984). Thus, my findings may also be of interest to scholars and stakeholders of sustainability. Moreover, sustainability research has tended to favour the Taker perspective (e.g., Mohr, Webb, & Harris, 2001). Thus, my focus on disposition (i.e., Providers) within a potentially socially responsible behaviour meets a gap in the literature (Bianchi & Birtwistle, 2010).

### 1.2.5 Research Approach

The final methodology, methods, and findings did not become apparent until my research had commenced with grounded theory, as Weick (1988, p. 305) pointed out, “the explorer cannot know what he is facing until he faces it, and then looks back over the episode to sort out what happened.”



Overall, exploratory semi-structured in depth interviews were conducted with members of P2P renting and swapping websites to explore experiences, motivations (e.g., sustainability, idling capacity, and price), and deterrents (e.g., issues of trust between strangers, inconvenience) within the relevant practices of disposition and acquisition. The overall structure of this thesis is summarised in the next section.

## 1.3 Structure of Thesis

This chapter has introduced how I became motivated to conduct this study. I have defined Collaborative Consumption, P2P renting and online swapping within the literature, which due to their inchoate presence, guided an exploratory research approach asking, “What do we have here?”.

**Literature Review.** In the second chapter, I discuss how literature should be used within a grounded theory study. I describe a phased approach to reviewing the literature and provide a reflection on researcher bias to assess any pre-conceptions which may have impacted this study. Then, CC is defined and placed within the extant literature. The chapter concludes with a preliminary non-committal literature review parameterising and defining the processes of second-hand disposition and acquisition.

**Methodology.** In the third chapter, I continue my non-committal literature review by presenting my chosen philosophical foundations: ontology (critical realism), epistemology (constructionism), and theoretical perspectives (interpretivism, pragmatism). Using these foundations, I then create an ontological-epistemological model to summarise my theoretical perspectives and support my chosen methodology (grounded theory). I then explain the type of grounded theory I followed by discussing my chosen methods of data sources (respondents who had signed up to P2P renting and swapping websites), data collection (online interviews), and data analysis (comparative thematic analysis).

**Findings.** The fourth chapter presents the findings to my qualitative interviews. Thematic analysis became guided around six referential questions: what (Type of Transferred Object), how (Consumer Involvement), when (Temporality), where and with whom (Anonymity), and why (Market Mediation and Political Consumerism). Throughout the chapter I use these dimensions to build an overall discussion for answering “what is going on here” for P2P renting and swapping respondents.

**Discussion.** In the final chapter I readdress my initial research questions. Motivating and deterring factors behind CC activities (online swapping and P2P renting) are compared and contrasted between different user types (Providers, Takers, and Non-Users). The nature of the experiences derived from these activities and how they may differ between user types is also discussed. With this discussion, enabling factors are suggested to make these systems more appealing. Finally, I close my thesis with a reflection of contributions, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

## (Section 2.1) Planning a Literature Review

A phased approach to reviewing the literature is applied for a grounded theory study.



## (Section 2.2) Defining Collaborative Consumption

The umbrella term for peer-to-peer exchange, CC is formally defined and placed within the extant literature.



## (Section 2.3) Consumer Disposition - Providers

Consumer disposition of goods is defined where Providers divest themselves of their possessions on a continuum of duration.



## (Section 2.4) Consumer (Re)Acquisition - Takers

Consumer acquisition of second-hand goods cast out by individual providers is formally explained for the purpose of this study to get an overview of Takers in CC exchange.

## 2.1 Method of Literature Review

“What is the meaning of it all?”

“Ah, I have no data. I cannot tell. Perhaps you have yourself formed some opinion?”

– Sherlock Holmes, *The Adventure of the Copper Beeches*

(Doyle, 2011, paragraph 2454).

“I have no data yet. It is a capital mistake to theorise before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts”

– Sherlock Holmes, *A Scandal in Bohemia*

(Doyle, 2011, paragraph 24).

Before doing “what the people want” by providing a review of the extant literature (Glaser, 1998, p. 72), I begin this chapter with a discussion of how literature should be used in a grounded theory study – a topic in which debates have been plentiful (McGhee et al., 2007). Two common queries for reviewing literature are addressed: (1) When it should be conducted – before, during, or after the study; and (2) Why it should be conducted – which also answers how rigorous or comprehensive it should be (e.g., Cutcliffe, 2000; McGhee, et al., 2007).

### 2.1.1 Reviewing Literature in a Grounded Theory Study

First, I should explain the term “data.” According to Glaser, “all is data” (e.g., Glaser, 2001, p. 145). This means *anything* that I as the researcher am (or have been) exposed to should be considered for its relevance with informing the question “What do we have here?” (Stern, 1994, p. 220). Thus, any information relevant to “what is going on in the research scene is the data, whatever the source, whether interview, observations, documents, in whatever combination” (Glaser, 2001, p. 145) should be reflected upon. This includes the formal literature review as well as any prior knowledge I was already sensitive to from previous exposure to the literature. “All is data” also suggests literature should not be myopically focused only on the relevant “field” of study. Rather, I should become horizontally mindful of extant theories so when data becomes discovered, I have the ability to reproduce (i.e., apply) or transform (i.e., adapt) theories (from any field, whether directly or indirectly related to the topic) which become relevant to explain what is happening. Reading unrelated literature

can promote “theoretical sensitivity to conceptualisations of data and to theoretical codes” (Glaser, 1992, p. 35).

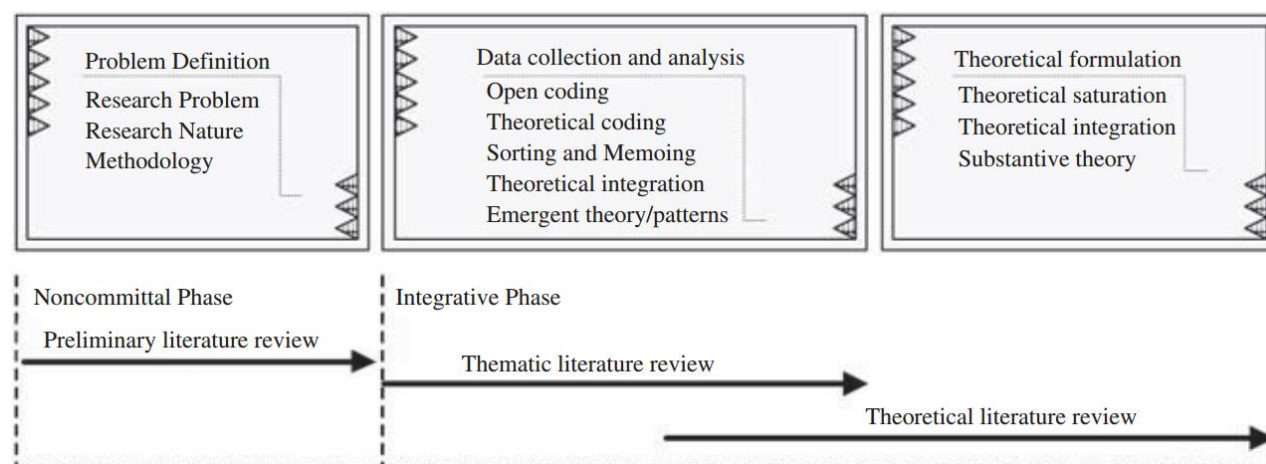
The classic Glaserian grounded theory approach (which softly guided this study) suggests beginning only with an interest in a “phenomenon underlying the data under study, rather than an interest in the data itself or its relationship with a presupposed hypothesis” (Williams, 2002, p. 49). Thus, researchers are encouraged to “suspend their knowledge” and keep an open mind. Literature and presumptions should only be reviewed *a posteriori* (i.e., *after* the study has commenced) to “ensure that theories systematically emerge directly from data” rather than from preconceptions (Simmons, 2011, p. 20). In other words, rather than using literature as a drunkard might use a lamppost (for support) the literature should be used for making one’s way through darkness (for illumination and discovery).

According to Glaser and Strauss, “an effective strategy is, at *first* [emphasis added], literally to ignore [...] the area under study” (1967, p. 37). Prior to beginning my research (i.e., qualitative interviews), I chose not to explore “facts” about swapping or renting websites. I therefore avoided preconceptions on the website’s functionalities, how transactions would unfold, whether social networking options were available, or what features or terms the websites had put in place to foster trust. This was so I (as an outsider who was ignorant of the situation) could be genuinely curious when it came to “probing” the respondents. Thus, my initial aim was to enter the research with an exploratory rather than confirmatory understanding. However, as my research progressed, observations from websites, blogs and news articles were discovered and reapplied through constant comparative analysis. In this way, “ideas inductively derived from the data form[ed] mini-theories, which [were] then either confirmed or refuted by subsequent theoretically sampled data” (McGhee et al., 2007, p. 211).

Though I avoided making preconceptions about the websites or user experiences, I did not want to be ignorant of what had already been studied about swapping or renting in general. Further, I did not want to start without at least “a partial framework of local concepts, which designate a few principal or gross features of the situations” (Cutcliffe, 2000, p. 1481) which I intended to study. I therefore followed a segmented Literature Review approach (as exemplified in **Figure 2.1**) with two phases: (1) Non-committal and (2) Integrative.

**Figure 2.1** Phased Literature Review.

(Reproduced exactly from Urquhart & Fernandez, 2013, p. 229)



Literature in the **Non-Committal phase** was used to: (1) “Frame the problem” (e.g., Creswell, 1994, p. 23) – define the context and extant terms being used to describe the phenomena; (2) Discover broadly what had already been studied – rather than reinvent theories one should attempt to advance them; and (3) Engage in the philosophy, methodology and methods behind grounded theory to create an appropriate research plan (e.g., McCallin, 2003).

Literature in the **Integrative phase** (during and after data analysis) was then used to develop theoretical sensitivity and acquire a toolkit full of “sensitizing concepts” (Glaser, 1978) which could be used to enhance the coding process and enrich the discussion of results. I reviewed most of the literature during data analysis *after* key themes had already started to emerge, consequently making literature relevance and organisation determined by generated theories (Urquhart & Fernandez, 2006). My understanding and framework of acquisition and disposition did not emerge until interviews had already begun. In this sense, I used literature as a source of *data* (e.g., discovery of emergent fit for grounded theory) rather than a source for constructing *propositions* or pre-understandings. For this reason, the main findings from my integrative literature have been placed into my Findings section (see Chapter 4) to keep the discussion more parsimonious.

These phases were not entirely linear or mutually exclusive as my review of the literature was constantly rewritten and compared with incoming data. Although I reviewed most of the literature presented in this chapter *after* data collection had commenced (i.e., my integrative review of the literature did *not* inform my data collection/interview questions), it is not mandatory the thesis follow in that order (Suddaby, 2006). Thus, for the purposes of clarity (see Section 3.3.4.1) and



communicative resonance (see Section 3.3.4.4), I have included this chapter to present the literature in a more traditional manner (e.g., before the methodology section) to ‘give the people what they want’ (Glaser, 1998, p. 72) and better introduce the topic. Thus, this chapter includes literature from *both* the non-committal and integrative review phases, but is presented as a “non-committal” review.

## 2.1.2 “Non-Committal” Literature Review Objectives

This non-committal literature review had three objectives: (1) Frame the problem of Collaborative Consumption (CC); (2) Discover broadly what had already been discovered by exploring the CC mechanisms from the user perspective (i.e., disposition and reacquisition); and (3) Engage with philosophical foundations to help guide the methods of my inquiry (to be discussed in Chapter Three).

**Collaborative Consumption.** As P2P renting and swapping fall under the umbrella of “Collaborative Consumption,” I first needed to clarify the competing definitions of CC for this thesis (as discussed in Section 1.1). This allowed me to “frame the problem” according to the wider narrative. The non-committal literature also helped me understand commonly used CC nomenclature and themes. Thus, Section 2.2 presents the second part of this objective with an overview of the main CC **drivers** (Section 2.2.1), **necessary conditions** (Section, 2.2.2), and **motivations** (Section 2.2.3) as first introduced by Rachel Botsman in 2010. In addition, Section 2.2.4 introduces **a conceptual model of CC** that serves to organise the rest of my review on disposition and reacquisition practices.

**Disposition and Second-Hand Acquisition.** A brief look at the literature revealed a myriad of concepts and frames of inquiry relevant to P2P renting and online swapping; including, but not limited to, theories on two-sided markets (e.g., Rysman, 2009), human-computer interaction (e.g., Harvey et al., 2015; Satchell & Dourish, 2009); online networks (e.g., Garton et al., 1997); communities (e.g., Felson & Spaeth, 1978; McMillan & Chavis, 1986); political consumerism (e.g., Micheletti, 2003); access-based consumption (e.g., Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012); second-hand consumption (Gregson & Crewe, 2003); and usage-based Product-Service-Systems (e.g., Behrendt et al., 2003; Hirschl, Konrad, & Scholl, 2003; Tukker, 2004). Although I was open to exploring all of these research avenues for the purpose of my *integrative* literature review (i.e., as a source of data to help explain incoming themes), I found the latter two options offered the best insight for the purpose of my *non-committal* review of the literature (i.e., introducing the topic). For the second objective, I therefore looked at the current body of knowledge on motivations/deterrents for **Disposition by Providers** (Section 2.3) and **(Re)Acquisition by Takers** (Section 2.4).

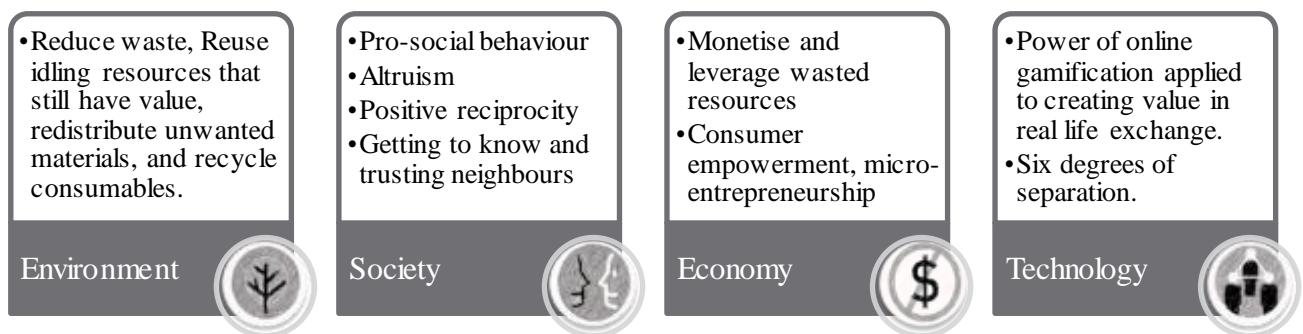
## 2.2 Collaborative Consumption


*Collaborative Consumption describes a multi-sided market system (e.g., Seamans & Zhu, 2013) where various processes of exchange between Providers and Takers take place via an enabling intermediary.*

### 2.2.1 Metaphors of “Empowerment” for Collaborative Consumption

This section attempts to discuss some of the main metaphors used within the CC narrative. As illustrated in **Figure 2.2**, there are four main ideologies that explain the driving forces of CC as an alternative consumption groundswell (Botsman, 2010; Botsman & Rogers, 2010). I view these drivers as metaphors of “*empowerment*,” because they each represent an interpretation where CC is supposed to *empower* consumers in addressing their concerns/desires within each metaphor/driver.

**Figure 2.2** Four Drivers of Collaborative Consumption (as introduced by Botsman, 2010).<sup>31</sup>



 **Environmental Empowerment.** Botsman and Rogers (2010) used the image of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch – an impenetrable oceanic vortex of plastic waste estimated to be twice the size of Texas and up to 30 metres deep (e.g., Moore, Lattin, & Zellers; 2005) – to describe the result of careless disposal and unsustainable practices. As environmental concerns have been becoming increasingly salient to consumers (e.g., Heinrichs, 2013; Klein, 2014; Leonard, 2010; Martenson, 2011), a trend towards green marketing, operational efficiencies, and sustainable and anti-consumption have been accumulating since the 1970s to solve the threat of environmental harm (e.g. Kinnear et al., 1974; Zikmund & Stanton, 1971; Prothero & Fitchett, 2000).

<sup>31</sup> Images originally retrieved in 2010 from <http://www.collaborativeconsumption.com/spreadables>; licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](#).

Traditional environmental efforts have been on improving product characteristics through sustainable operations (e.g., Reinhardt, 1998), but trying to get consumers to buy green products is still too focused on materialism (more is better) and does not help decrease the rising inefficient levels of consumption (Botsman & Rogers, 2010). For instance, if someone says ‘be green,’ one often thinks of eco-labelling, hybrid cars, more durable products, and recycling. The problem with these micro strategies that target the ‘green consumer’ is that they ignore the issues of throwaway consumption. In fact, if products are labelled as eco-friendly, consumers may sometimes think it is okay to consume more, making any environmental gains null (Sanne, 2001). Instead of asking people to replace inefficient products with more sustainable options (i.e., why is it that to be sustainable all of a sudden I have to go buy more things?) and promoting outright anti-consumption, people need to be encouraged to consume differently. Connolly and Prothero (2003) proposed a shift from emphasising micro strategies of ‘green’ production to macro strategies of encouraging sustainable consumption through systems involvement. Instead of encouraging people to stop consuming, or pushing green and expensive products to the ‘green’ segment, sustainable initiatives should attempt to *leverage* rather than reject commodity exchange (Prothero & Fitchet, 2000). One way this can be done is by the promotion of Collaborative Consumption (e.g., Botsman & Rogers, 2010). Indeed, Binninger et al. (2015) found from a qualitative analysis of CC blogs that the majority of CC websites were promoting environmental benefits in their marketing messages such as involvement being able to reduce “the ecological footprint, the carbon footprint, fighting planned obsolescence and waste, reuse and recycling, etc.” (p. 976). However, it is unclear whether CC users actually feel environmentally empowered, and if so, by how much.



**Social Empowerment.** The Great Pacific Garbage Patch that Botsman and Rogers (2010) envisaged as the result of careless disposal and unsustainable practices is not unlike the image you get when watching an episode of *Hoarding: Buried Alive* (on The Learning Channel). Piles of useless stuff, belongings and old purchases cloud your vision, sometimes towering over the average person. There is no room to walk around, and the floor, kitchen counters, and bathtub haven’t been seen in years. A number of people live in extreme clutter, entrapped by their extensions of self, finding more pleasure from products than social interactions (e.g. Kurutz, 2011). This is a damaging result of materialism embedded in social disorders, where the accumulation of things deceives us into thinking we are happy, trapping us into our own lonely cocoons; and in the case of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, inefficient consumption ends up hurting the environment. Some people become so attached to private ownership and possessions that even after becoming homeless they still pay for storage units to hoard their treasures (Clayton, 2003). These extreme forms of hoarding and overconsumption are

criticised as detrimental to the wellbeing of society. At the same time as we have been drowning in material possessions, we have also been “bowling alone” (e.g., Putnam, 2000). Consumerism has said to have deteriorated our social capital so much that our neighbours have become “total strangers” (e.g., McKibben, 2007; Rushkoff, 2009) and we have become a generation of self-interested “Me’s.” Blooming in the midst of an individualistic society, there has been a resurgence of community values (e.g., Dunkelman, 2014; McKnight & Block, 2010; Putnam, 2000; Putnam & Feldstein, 2003) and Collaborative Consumption is often touted as a hammering force that can break the shackles of material greed, allow us to look over the fence at our neighbours, and become a generation of “We’s” (Botsman & Rogers, 2010).



**Economic Empowerment.** In response to the global economic crisis, cost consciousness has induced a wave of entrepreneurial activity (e.g., Jakob, 2013; Stevens, 2011) and thrifty consumption behaviours (e.g., Alexander & Stone, 2009; Bondy & Talwar, 2011; Valaskova & Klietnik, 2015). Providers have been called micro-entrepreneurs (e.g., Pless, 2012; Van den Broek et al., 2012) and have been offered the empowerment to leverage their spare possessions, space, and time into value through co-created exchange. For example, many Providers have been enticed by the potential profits from renting out their possessions (e.g., Chicotsky, 2012; Marsh, 2008; Warnick, 2012) and Takers have been enticed by resisting first-hand markets for cheaper alternatives.



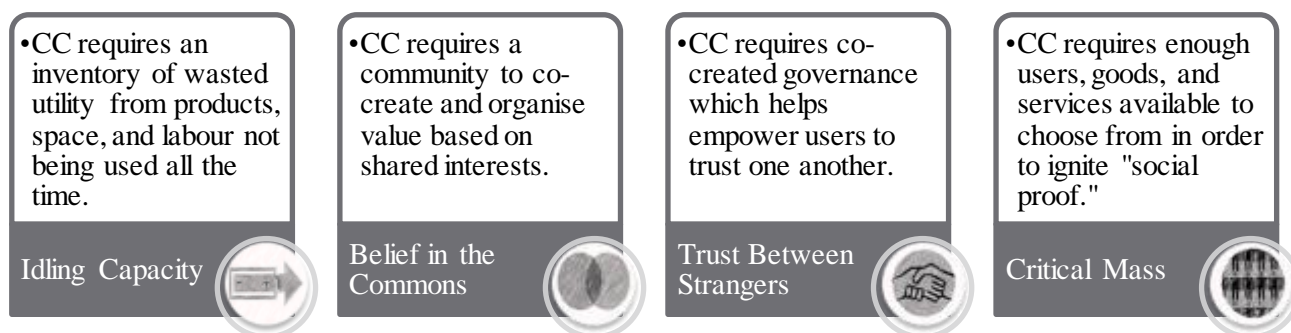
**Technological Empowerment.** Traditionally, P2P co-creation and exchange has been hard to coordinate without technology, as for example, trying to find someone who needs a chocolate fountain or has a spare gorilla suit would be a time-consuming search process via conventional classified media. These reinvented forms of consumption are made possible with broker websites that act as a ‘bridge’ (Granovetter, 1973) in bringing peers together where people can find what they want (e.g., Takers) and allowing people to list these things (e.g., Providers). Thus, users are empowered by the endless possibilities of Web 2.0 where anyone can “contribute with content and connect with each other” (Carroll & Romano, 2010, p. 190).


### 2.2.2 Necessary Conditions of Collaborative Consumption

Botsman (2010) introduced four principles which contribute to the success of P2P exchange. The absence of these conditions (see **Figure 2.3**) represent the most prominently found deterrents for CC participation and success: Idling Capacity (e.g., Hirschl et al., 2003; Lamberton & Rose, 2012; Shih et

al., 2015); Belief in the Commons; Trust between Strangers (e.g., Campbell Mithun, 2012; Haddad, 2011; Tussyadiah, 2015); and Critical Mass (e.g., Piscielli et al., 2015).

**Figure 2.3** Four Principles of “Collaborative Consumption” (as introduced by Botsman, 2010).<sup>32</sup>



 **Idling Capacity** refers to the unused utility of products not in use. Benkler (2004) defined it more formally as “an overcapacity relative to [an] individual owner’s needs.” (p. 308). For example, a consumer who uses their iPad only two hours a day would have twenty-two hours of unused utility per day. Consumers often possess items they do not use all of the time, therefore they hold an inventory of items which could bring social, financial, and altruistic benefits to both themselves and others by providing access to the idling capacity, or when the idling capacity is 100% it may behave them to provide others with permanent access to this capacity. Product service systems (PSS) literature often suggests renting products may be more successful for products with idling capacity (Mont, 2000; Behrendt et al., 2003). For example, if a rental product has a high idling capacity, consumers are less likely to fear not being able to access the product when they need it, or be affected by the inconvenience of having to go out and get the product on a regular basis.

According to Trocchia and Janda (2002), there are six main causes for the non-use: (1) Low functionality – too difficult to clean, use, and/or maintain; (2) Disappointment in purchase – results from using the product were not as expected; (3) Self-consciousness – embarrassing to use due to social consequences; (4) Risk of physical injury – too hazardous to use; (5) Lack of enthusiasm – no longer interesting or exciting to use; (6) Life change – no longer relevant or needed.

Idling capacity can also apply to a consumer’s spare time, known as cognitive surplus. Shirkey (2010) gave an interesting account of how the free time of consumers has proliferated with rising GDP

<sup>32</sup> Images originally retrieved in 2010 from <http://www.collaborativeconsumption.com/spreadables>; licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](#)

(and by association, rising lifespans and education) and industrialisation. He claimed TV sitcoms as a crux response to this surplus of free time – with the average consumer watching 20 hours of television a week (equating to a half-time job in the world of 40-hour work weeks). Using TV and Wikipedia statistics, he estimated the world has over a trillion hours of annual free time. Moving into the next generation of media tools and technology, he argued this cognitive surplus could be transformed from *passive* activities like individual consumption (e.g., read a book, watch television, play video games) to *active* deeds like creating and sharing through social participation (e.g., volunteering and collaborating on projects with communal or civic value). Because disposition and acquisition take effort and time, second-hand consumption requires consumers to have a perceived idling capacity of their time.



**Belief in the Commons** refers to having faith over the sharing system itself. This idea stems from Hardin's (1968) 'The Tragedy of the Commons,' which is a metaphor for free riders taking advantage of public goods. The 'commons' is a grazing land in which farmers can reap better benefits by using more of the commons, but when other farmers also start acting in their own interests and use more of the commons it leads to exploitation and destruction of the land. In the case of Collaborative Consumption, private ownership is often preferred over sharing and the public commons because of the few individuals who act in their own interest and are likely to overuse and abuse the products being shared; thus, "freedom in a commons brings ruin to all" (Hardin, 1968, p. 1246). People often criticise free-riders of the system, as "what appears to be sharing is actually more a self-interested commodity exchange" (Belk, 2010, p. 728). Pfeiffer and Nowak (2006) provided examples of the commons as applied to online peer-to-peer networks. For instance, because it is free to post on Craigslist, people can post listings with irrelevant, illegal, or offending messages for their own gains. The tragedy of the commons would suggest offensive spam could cause "the destruction of the land," (with the land being [www.craigslist.org](http://www.craigslist.org)) because people would no longer be able to find relevant postings in the mass of irrelevant ones. However, if the community has someone to counteract the tragedies of the commons (e.g., by taking responsibility to care, maintain, and *regulate* the common goods being shared) or the community has developed norms of behaviour around sharing (e.g., Ozanne & Ozanne, 2011) than there will likely be more faith in the commons (Ostrom, 1990).



**Trust between Strangers** is another necessity for the success of CC. For example, how does a Provider know the renter won't break their stuff? How does a swapper know the other person will send an item back to complete the trade? Veering away from commercial outlets offering the usual 'satisfaction guaranteed' assumption, these interactions of virtual and physical exchange between strangers leaves many would-be consumers with potential doubt. The literature is

rich with studies looking at trust among online traders (e.g., Bolton, Katok, & Ockenfels, 2004). Transparency and decentralisation are key precursors to fostering confidence in P2P systems (Botsman & Rogers, 2010). Typically, trust is self-governed with tools provided by the online network. For example, eBay and Trade Me have consumer rating systems to distinguish reputable and disreputable traders. Likewise, reputation of the actual website and the company might come into play when consumers are considering whether to participate or not (Mont, 2008b; Rexfelt & Omas, 2009; Schrader, 1999).



**Critical Mass** is the required amount of force (i.e., how many employees, products, customers) to maintain an online system so it doesn't become a "cyber ghost town" (Preece, 2001, p. 348). Critical mass can be traced back to Hiltz and Turoff (1978), who noticed small conference groups failing and being swallowed up by larger conferences due to a small amount of members, inactivity, and not enough new material being produced. Economic theorists expanded this research with theories of "network externalities" which could help explain technology adoption (e.g., Katz and Shapiro, 1986; Markus, 1987). The hypothesis of network externalities claims that as more people adopt a technology, the value of the technology will increase (a large user-base provides a large selection of available products and services), and thus lead to further adoption. Many scholars suggest critical mass is imperative for community success (e.g., Rice et al., 1990) and this has been empirically supported in P2P networks adoption studies (e.g., Song & Walden, 2007). Particularly relevant is social proof – if enough people are participating in the community, the barrier to new customer acquisition that exists because of the uncertainty with having to change old consumption habits, will wither (Botsman and Rogers, 2010). Likewise, a certain amount of products will be needed for the system to meet usage and style demand so that consumers in the long tail will find what they are seeking and have enough variety to choose from (e.g., Anderson, 2006). Indeed, Piscielli et al.'s (2015) case study on P2P renting website "Ecomodo" confirmed that a low critical mass impedes user participation.

### 2.2.3 Motivations of Collaborative Consumption

Although my non-committal review suggested that I set aside most of the literature until data collection, my integrative review gave me insight into the most commonly promoted motivations of Collaborative Consumption websites in general (Botsman & Rogers, 2010). These are summarised in **Table 2.1** under the categories of functional and hedonic benefits (e.g., Stone, Horne, & Hibbert, 1996).



**Table 2.1** Common Benefits of “Collaborative Consumption.”

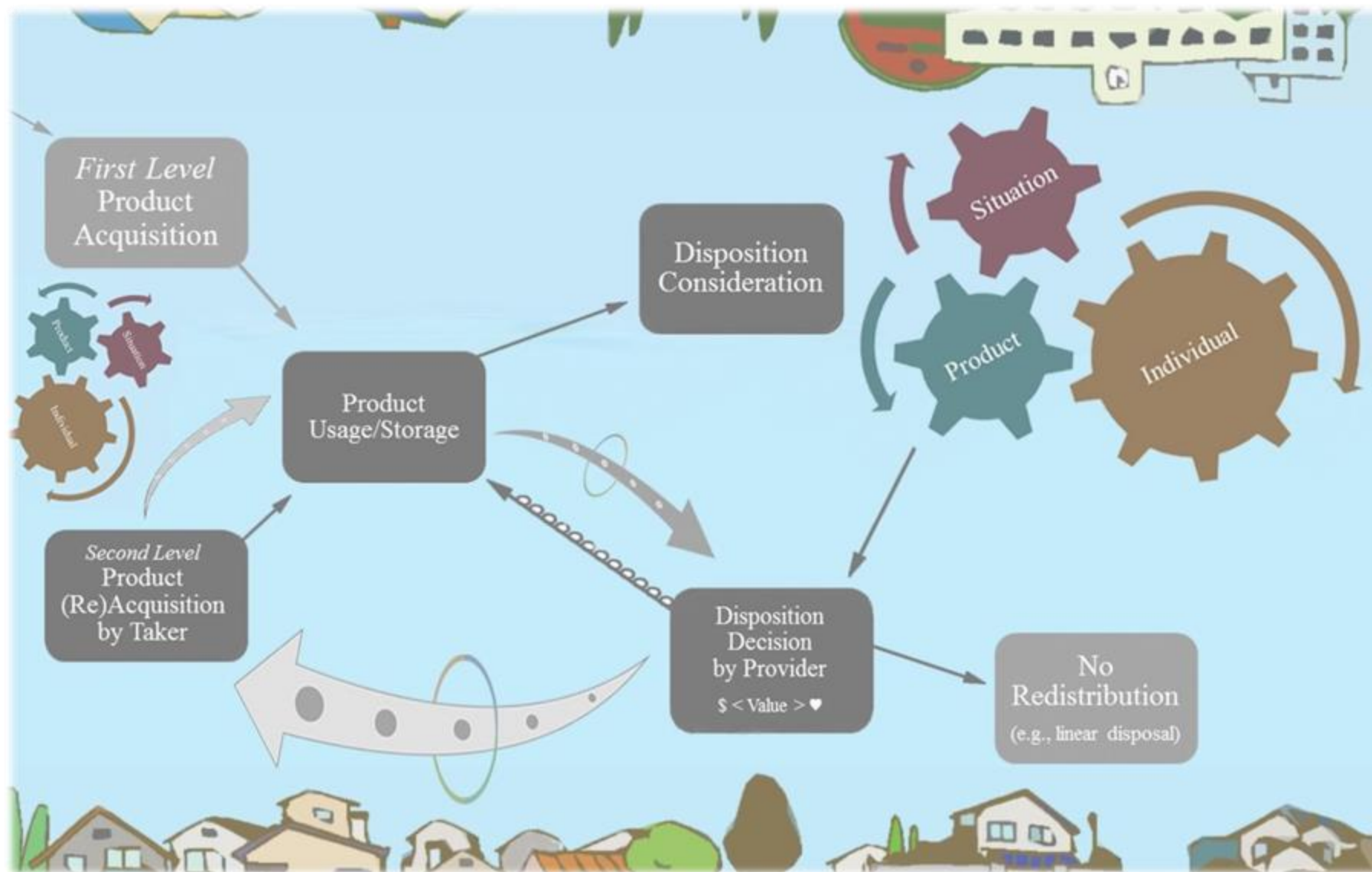
<b>Functional Benefits</b>	<b>Economic Value:</b> Saving money (i.e., reducing the costs of acquisition/disposition) and/or making money (i.e., recouping the costs of previous acquisition) (e.g., Balck & Cracau, 2015; Binninger et al., 2015; Campbell Mithun, 2012; Chu & Liao, 2008; Chu & Koo, 2012; Chudizan, 2015; Devinney et al., 2010; Groomes & Seyfang, 2012; Hamari et al., 2015; Piscielli et al., 2015; Roux & Guiot, 2008; Tussyadiah, 2015). However, the financial gains are usually modest for Providers, which suggests amateur Providers of low-cost items may have other incentives as well (e.g., Lemaitre & de Barnier, 2013; van de Glind, 2013).
	<b>Housekeeping:</b> Providers may be motivated to clean and purge objects. Takers may be motivated to reduce unnecessary future disposition and purging activities (e.g., Albinsson & Perera, 2009; Coulter & Ligas, 2003; Gregson & Crewe, 2003; Groomes & Seyfang, 2012; Herrmann, 1991).
	<b>Pragmatic Reasons:</b> “It makes sense” because it offers better, more efficient value through quality and added services than alternatives (e.g., Campbell Mithun, 2012; Chudizan, 2015; Hirschl et al., 2003; Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010; Mont, 2008a; Piscielli et al., 2015; van de Glind, 2013).
	<b>Political Reasons:</b> Users may be motivated to participate because they believe it reduces waste and damage to the environment (e.g., Balck & Cracau, 2015; Binninger et al., 2015; Campbell & Mithun, 2012; Chudizan, 2015; Hamari et al., 2015; John, 2013; Groomes & Seyfang, 2012; Lawson, 2010; Lemaitre & de Barnier, 2013; Malhotra et al., 2013; Piscielli et al., 2015; Roux & Guiot, 2008; Tussyadiah, 2015; van de Glind, 2013) and/or reduces negative social aspects of consumerism (e.g., Belk, 2014; Binninger et al., 2015; Leismann et al., 2013).
<b>Hedonic Benefits</b>	<b>Hyperconsumption:</b> Takers may be motivated to acquire new things more often (e.g., Balck & Cracau, 2015; Binninger et al., 2015; Campbell & Mithun, 2012; Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010).
	<b>Gratification:</b> Providers may be motivated to share and help others (e.g., Campbell Mithun, 2012; Chudizan, 2015; Frick et al., 2013; Guillard & Roux, 2014) because they want to see their things being cared for and used (e.g., Herrmann, 1991; Lemaitre & de Barnier, 2013; Nelson & Rademacher, 2009; Paden & Stell, 2005; van de Glind, 2013).
	<b>Recreation:</b> Users may be motivated out of curiosity, to have fun, and/or try something new (e.g., Guiot & Roux, 2010; Lemaitre & de Barnier, 2013; Mathwick & Rigdon, 2004; Roux & Guiot, 2008).
	<b>Social Reasons:</b> Users may be motivated to make interpersonal connections and meet new people (e.g., Binninger et al., 2015; Campbell Mithun, 2012; Chudizan, 2015; Kohda & Matsuda, 2013; Piscielli et al., 2015; Roux & Guiot, 2008; Tussyadiah, 2015; van de Glind, 2013).

## 2.2.4 A Model of Collaborative Consumption

CC puts consumers at the middlepoint of redistribution/reuse channels as product disposition moves objects along to others. This process is illustrated in **Figure 2.4** as a basic model of CC *from the vantage point of the consumer* (i.e., there are other vantage points which may offer insight, but my thesis focuses on the end-user Peer participating as either a non-user, Provider, and/or Taker) which will frame the remaining sections of my non-committal literature review. To better understand the nature of the exchange as well as motivations and deterrents for online swapping and P2P renting, I now turn to the literature on **Disposition** (2.3) and **Acquisition** (2.4).



**Figure 2.4** A Model of Collaborative Consumption; Adapted from Paden & Stell's (2005, p. 108) "Model of Product Redistribution."





Providers and Takers must "jump through the hoops" involved in completing the exchange (e.g., involvement, costs and remuneration). This may involve informal social norms and/or formal mechanisms created by an online intermediary/website.



Resistant Disposition may occur if a Provider decides not to dispose of their item and thus moves back to the stage of product usage/storage.



Situational Factors represent temporary circumstances and occasions that may serve as a catalyst to reacquisition or disposition; such as: Physical surroundings, Social surroundings, Task definition, Temporal conditions, and Antecedent states (Belk, 1975).



Disposition Decisions from this arrow may be either temporary or permanent; but essentially a product is transferred to a Taker for their restricted or unrestricted use.



Product attributes that impact consumer motivations for possession and dispossession are split into two major categories: (1) Instrumental/Functional; and/or (2) Symbolic (e.g., Belk, 1988; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochber-Halton, 1981; Furby, 1978; Green, Mandhachitara, & Smith, 2001; McCree, 1984; Richins, 1994).



Second-Level (Re)Acquisition breathes new life into a product. This arrow represents the story of the thing through different contexts (e.g., object-centred thinking, see Appadurai, 1986) and usage (e.g., alteration rituals, see Gregson & Crewe, 2003).



Individual Characteristics that show a consumer's orientation to make decisions about acquisition, usage, or disposition (e.g., Sproles & Kendall, 1986); such as value-seeking, risk-taking, knowledge and expertise, spontaneity, object attachment, etc.



Temporary Disposition has occurred when the Taker returns the borrowed or rented product to the original Provider.

## 2.3 Disposition by Providers

Compared to consumer acquisition, the disposal of goods was a neglected topic in consumer behaviour research (*and arguably still is* – e.g., Albinsson & Perera, 2009; Laitala, 2014; Roster, 2014) until Jacoby, Berning, and Dietvorst (1977) asked, “What About Disposition?”. In this thesis, I use the term “disposition” in its broadest sense, as a consumer *practice*<sup>33</sup> (see Cherrier, 2009a; Roster, 2014; Warde, 2005) which includes (1) the act of disposal/divestment itself, where Providers “move the ownership of a piece of goods to another person or entity” (Hibbert et al., 2005, p. 820); as well as (2) the processes of dispossession and object’s “detachment from self” (Lastovichia & Fernandez, 2005, p. 813), both physically and/or emotionally (Roster, 2001; Wallendorf & Young, 1989).

Consumer disposition decisions can be explained by three influences (e.g., Albinsson & Perera, 2009; Jacoby et al., 1977; Hanson, 1980; Paden & Stell, 2005): (1) Individual Characteristics; (2) Situational Factors; and (3) Product Attributes; which have an effect within the four stages of disposition as shown in **Figure 2.5**.

**Figure 2.5** The Process of Consumer Disposition (Hanson, 1980).



The progression of our understanding on this process (Hanson, 1980) has remained mostly neglected in the literature compared to acquisition. I therefore chose to structure my review on disposition around these four steps, which I view as a cyclical and constructive process (i.e., stages are not mutually exclusive, comprehensive, nor mandatory that they be completed in sequential order). These stages are now discussed in the next sections.

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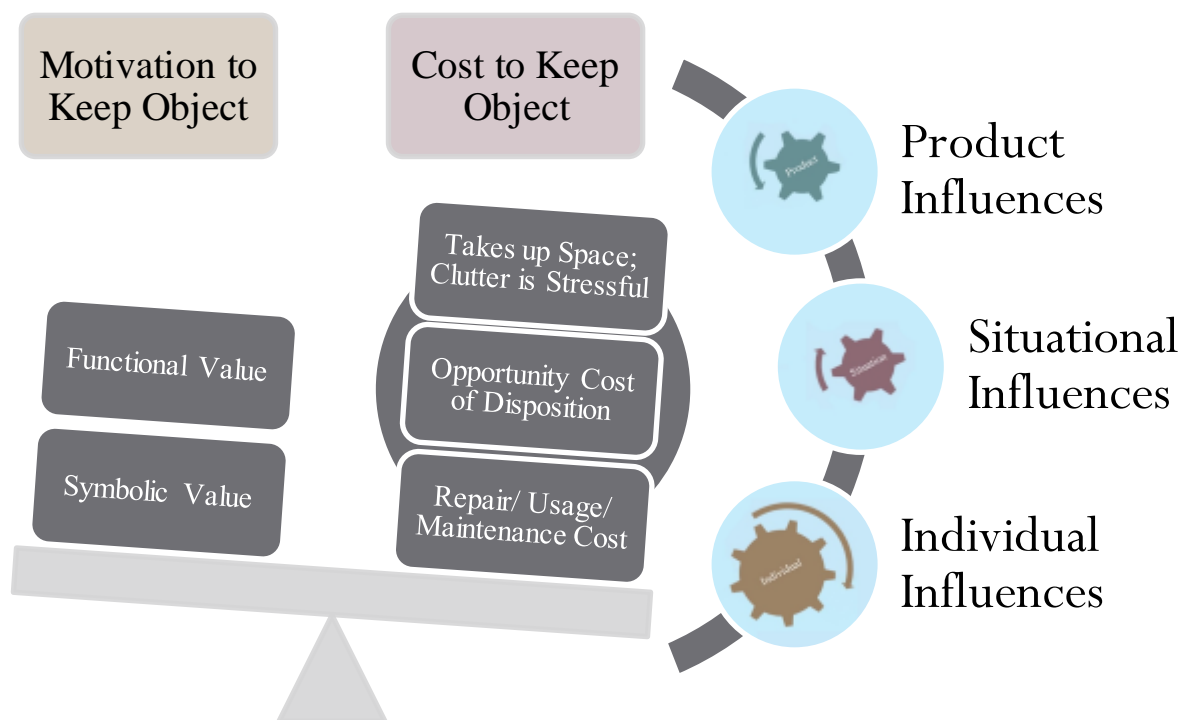
<sup>33</sup> For example, scholars often differentiate between “practice” from “behaviour” using the metaphors of individual agency and structure. Practice theory looks at phenomena occurring from the “middle” of “an organized nexus of actions” (Schatzki, 2002, p. 71) rather than originating from structures or individuals (e.g., “top down” and “bottom up” mechanisms). Although I have structured my review of the literature as a process of behaviour (i.e., decision-making process) because I am interested in motivations and deterrents, my holistic understanding of disposition is guided more by critical realism (this distinction will be expanded upon throughout my methodology literature review in Chapter Three).

### 2.3.1 Disposition Process:

#### (1) Problem Recognition

When a consumer perceives a significant difference between their desired and actual state, a “problem” is recognised (e.g., Bruner II & Pomazal, 1988). For example, some consumers may be faced with dissonance after a mistaken purchase of something they didn’t actually want or need (Hanson, 1980) such as clothing that doesn’t fit (e.g., Fisher et al., 2008; Laitala & Boks, 2012). Some consumers are faced with a tension between consumerism (e.g., wanting to buy more things for oneself) and social values (e.g., feeling responsible for people in need). This tension (i.e., triggering event) may initiate the process of disposition if a Provider perceives giving things away offsets their guilt for materialistic consumption (e.g., Ture & Ger, 2011). Put simply, the disposition process is initiated when a Provider recognises that a possession is no longer worth the effort to keep; thus the offset balance between the value and cost of keeping the item initiates problem recognition (e.g., Roster, 2001). Problem recognition for disposition is exemplified in **Figure 2.6** with three triggering cues: (1) Product Attributes, such as object obsolescence; (2) Situational Influences, such as a lack of storage space; and/or (3) Individual Orientations, such as a need to purge and an aversion to product attachment.

**Figure 2.6** Triggering Events for Intention to Engage in Disposition.



Disposition practices can fall on a continuum of being spontaneous/unplanned/passive or systematic/planned/active (e.g., Chu & Liao, 2007; Harrell & McConocha, 1992). For example, the disposition “problem” is often prolonged and ignored by consumers rather than recognised, as many unused possessions are passively (i.e., subconsciously) moved to transient places, hidden away from visible daily life and forgotten (e.g., Maycroft, 2009; McCracken, 1988) until such product “cemetaries” are eventually unearthed (Casotti, Suarez, & Dias Campos, 2008), and a spontaneous need for disposition is triggered. Alternatively, consumers are sometimes active and systematic with their disposition decisions, as they may plan ahead how they intend to dispose of their object – even as far back to the stage of acquisition (e.g., Chu & Liao, 2007; Chu & Koo, 2012). A consumer’s level of activity in disposition is likely to be influenced by their level of involvement and attachment to the object, which can be explained by product attributes, situational influences, and individual tendencies.

***Product Attributes.*** Consumers may be tempted to dispose of objects which have become **functionally** obsolete, such as things that are worn, damaged, or no longer working. If an object has reached absolute functional obsolescence and the cost of repair exceeds the cost of replacement (e.g., Cooper, 2005b; Okada, 2001; Scelfo, 2009), a consumer is likely to recognise a need for disposal, especially if they are enticed by the opportunity cost of enhanced performance from a new product (e.g., Cripps & Meyer, 1994). Consumers may turn to disposition for objects that are no longer serving their originally intended use – such as getting rid of clothes and toys that the kids have outgrown or selling textbooks at the end of a college semester (e.g., Phillips & Sego, 2011). According to Gregson and Crewe, (2003), “‘functional’ commodities may be cast out not simply because they don’t work, but because an owner’s aesthetic principles have shifted” (p. 119) – thus consumers may also choose to dispose of objects when objects have become *relatively* obsolete (e.g., Hanson, 1980). Relative obsolescence may be for reasons that are psychological (e.g., DeBell & Dardis, 1979; Hoffer & Reilly, 1984; Morgan & Birtwistle, 2009; Winakor, 1969), technological (e.g., Cripps & Meyer, 1994; Grewal et al., 2004), or economic (e.g., Bayus, 1988); and unlike *absolute* obsolescence, indicate that the still functioning product has not yet reached the end of its useful life (e.g., Antonides, 1991; Cooper, 2004). Ultimately, it is usually by product *replacement*, that an old product becomes relatively obsolete and a ready candidate for disposal because it can offer monetary and functional value toward acquiring a new product (e.g., Chu & Liao, 2007; Cruz-Cardenas & del Val Nunez, 2016).

An object’s **symbolic** value is another *Product Attribute* which influences disposition. Lastovicka and Fernandez (2005) distinguished between positively charged and negatively charged possessions. Negatively charged items are more likely to be disposed willingly and easily, as consumers want to

distance themselves from negative memories associated with the objects (e.g., Cherrier & Murray, 2007; McAlexander, 1991), or are less weary with disposing “of objects that lack strong connections to identity” (Phillips & Sego, 2011, p. 441). Whether negatively charged items are more acceptable to be disposed by rental or swap is unclear. Positively charged products that have special meaning for consumers are cherished for sentimental memories (e.g., Kleine et al., 1995; Lastovicka & Fernandez, 2005) and may be considered a part of the consumer’s identity or extended self (e.g., Belk, 1988; Kleine et al., 1995). Such goods have been argued “never to be sold” contenders for disposition (Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989) due to their positive symbolic value and are susceptible to loss aversion (e.g., Boyce et al., 1992; Irwin, 1994). However, research has shown that disposition of these types of items may be a way of “achieving symbolic immortality” where “the movement of objects from the private to the public sphere acts as a cultural blueprint and reinforces social relations” (Cherrier, 2009, p. 329). Online resellers have been found to be motivated to dispose their positively charged items for generative reasons such as valuing the product’s symbolic immortality and being generous to others (e.g., Durif, Ertz, & Arcand, 2014; Lemaitre & de Barnier, 2013). Alternatively, an object may also be considered for disposal if its symbolic value has been demoted from “me” to “not me” as it is no longer part of the extended self (e.g., Klein, Kleine, & Allen, 1995; Lastovicka & Fernandez, 2005).

***Situational Factors*** (Belk, 1975) affecting a consumer’s physical or social environment may also trigger the disposition process. For example, research has found that the motivation of making an extra buck may arise because a consumer is saving for a special activity such as travel and entertainment or a luxury that would otherwise be unjustifiable (Rucker et al., 1995). The act of disposition can come about from situational factors such as lack of storage space (e.g., Domina & Koch, 2002; Fischer et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2012), moving (geographic relocation), home renovations and decorating (e.g., Gregson, Metcalfe, & Crewe, 2007; Hibbert et al., 2005), or illness and death in the family (e.g., Ekerdt, Addington, & Hayter, 2011; Kates, 2001); and situational “role transitions” (e.g., Albinsson & Perera, 2009; Young, 1991) such as job loss (e.g., Roberts, 1991), divorce (e.g., McAlexander, 1991), graduating college (e.g., Paden & Stell, 2005), or changes in the family lifecycle (e.g., Phillips & Sego, 2011). Other examples of where consumers may be inclined to disposition may include: recouping costs of previously-purchased objects during product replacement (e.g., Wilhelm et al., 2011); avoiding the cumbersome costs of moving possessions overseas; home renovations requiring rooms to be cleared out may spark an onset of “spring cleaning” and clearing out (e.g., Ha-Brookshire & Hodges, 2009; Hibbert et al., 2005); a death of an elder coinciding with a lifetime of stuff having to be sorted through; a job loss prompting a consumer to voluntarily sell their things to

make ends meet or involuntarily lose things through repossession; retirement being accompanied with downsizing; and parents-to-be trading in their two-door convertible for a four-door family sedan.

***Individual Characteristics.*** Consumers who “identify themselves as clean, uncluttered, and organised” are likely to keep stock of their belongings’ utility and continually purge themselves of old things that are no longer being used (Coulter & Ligas, 2003, p. 43). For permanent disposition this may be in an effort to “get rid of the clutter” and maintain a simplified life full of cleanliness and order (e.g., Albinsson & Perera, 2009; Dovel & Healy, 1977; Winakor & Martin, 1963). This type of “downshifting” can also be found in the voluntary simplifier literature (e.g., Ballantine & Creery, 2010), where consumers seek a lifestyle that is in “correspondence with one’s values” (Schor, 1998, p. 22). Because purgers are more likely to notice unused utility they may seek ways to increase the utility of their things, but temporary disposition implies that a consumer still has to store their product after lending or renting it out. This may be a dissonant with what Gregson and Crewe (2003) argued to be as the primary driver of disposition – space-saving as a way of “good house-keeping” is often the “primary strategy through which individuals ‘cast out’ and the main way in which commodities enter the second-hand world” (p. 119).

Purgers also tend to be trend conscious “innovators” (e.g., Rogers, 1962) and have been found to dispose more frequently than those less sensitive to fashion and trends (e.g., Lang et al., 2013; Law et al., 2004). Trend conscious consumers are more likely to dispose of out-dated items in order to “make room for new belongings” (Albinsson & Perera, 2009, p. 345). For example, if a consumer always buys the latest phone, it follows they are likely to dispose of the old one (e.g., Wilhelm, Yankov, & Magee, 2011). The reasons for this are mostly economic. For example, a consumer wanting to stay up-to-date with trends may want to recoup the costs of prior purchases before getting a replacement not only to be able to afford it, but also to avoid feeling guilty over the wasted utility of the old product (Chu & Liao, 2008). In more extreme cases, “hungry adopters” have emerged in South Korea, where consumers engage in an “auction culture” by buying new products with the intent to sell it back into the second-hand markets so they can afford to buy the next new product and “trade up” (Chu & Koo, 2012). Even if a consumer is not trying to “trade up,” they may still be likely to be motivated by economic benefits that come with selling or trading a product (e.g., Dovel & Healy, 1977; Sherry, 1990). Through the process of temporary disposition, a consumer may be able to afford the next trend by renting out their current possessions; however, the tendency of purgers to want to maintain order and simplicity with their possessions may dissuade them from wanting to keep an inventory of their possessions for rental.

Purgers are also less likely to attach sentimental meaning to their possessions (Phillips & Sego, 2011) and rarely consider objects to be a part of their extended selves (e.g., Belk, 1988). This allows them the freedom to dispose of things without the usual anxieties of takers treating their items with ambivalence which may occur with the disposition of positively charged possessions (e.g., Lastovicka & Fernandez, 2005; Price, Arnould, & Curasi, 2000). The model of ‘me’ to ‘we’ that was put forth by Lastovicka and Fernandez (2005) where sellers share themselves with buyers, could also be a motivation for disposition. Purgers have been argued to have more philanthropic motivations to dispose of their things, where consumers actively donate to charity or pass their items along to those in need for feelings of gratification (e.g., Gregson & Crewe, 2003; Paden & Stell, 2005).

### 2.3.2 Disposition Process:

#### (2) Search and Evaluation

Providers are predicted to be influenced by personal, commercial, and public sources of information (Hanson, 1980). For example, in the acquisition literature, it has been found that peers are a significant source of information and influence on purchase decisions (e.g., Lachance et al., 2003). However, Joung and Park-Poaps (2013) found peers had no significant influence on how consumers disposed of clothing, but family significantly influenced their decision to dispose charitably and environmentally. To the best of my knowledge, the search and evaluation stage of the disposition process seems to be the least studied in the literature, with barely any studies exploring how consumers find and evaluate information about disposition.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, some researchers have even removed the search and evaluation stage altogether from their discussion (e.g., Suarez et al., 2011). Compared to the abundance of information about acquisition, many consumers are unaware of ways to dispose of their possessions (e.g., Saphores et al., 2009). During the search and evaluation stage, potential Providers will consider different attributes (i.e., types) of disposition they are aware of and which are available to them that best match their dispossessed object, such as: (1) Duration; (2) Remuneration; and (3) Format/Place.

**Duration.** Jacoby et al. (1977) suggested a consumer contemplating disposition has three choices: (1) Keep the belonging, where it can continue to be used, altered to serve another purpose, or be stored for later use; (2) Temporarily get rid of the belonging, either by loaning or renting it out to

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<sup>34</sup> With the exception being from the literature on donation (e.g., Mitchell et al., 2009) and recycling, which has shown that having available information on how and where to recycle can have a significant (e.g., De Young 1989; Domina & Koch, 2002; Koukouvinos, 2012; Stall-Meados & Goudeau, 2012) or insignificant (e.g., Joung & Park-Poaps, 2013) impact on whether or not a consumer chooses to recycle.



someone else; or (3) Get rid of the belonging completely, where it can be thrown away, given away, sold, or traded. I define these three choices using the following terminology: (1) **Resistant** Disposition – where “keepers” choose to prolong the disposition decision; (2) **Temporary** Disposition – where “lenders” transfer certain degrees of ownership (*i.e., power*)<sup>35</sup> of their items to others for a specified period of time; and (3) **Permanent** Disposition – where “purgers” take actions to get rid of their items indefinitely (see **Figure 2.7**).

**Figure 2.7** Disposition Duration Continuum and Types of Providers.



Some scholars (e.g., Vanier, McFall & Krentler, 1986; Young & Wallendorf, 1989) have criticised Jacoby et al.’s (1977) taxonomy, suggesting the options of keeping, storing, renting, and lending are *usage* behaviours rather than disposal behaviours, which therefore creates a paradox where an item which is still owned is somehow considered ‘disposed of.’ However, these choices can be thought of as pre-disposition behaviours where consumers begin the process of detachment from the self (*i.e., dispossession*). For example, although disposal may not actually occur in resistant disposition,<sup>36</sup> it still accounts for instances of “problem recognition” that consumers may face in the disposition decision-making process (Hanson, 1980), such as the item no longer being used. Thus, resistant disposition represents the “potential waste of resources that could be utilized by secondary” Takers (Harrell & McChonocha, 1992, p. 400). Meanwhile, temporary disposition may enable reluctant Providers to eventually let go of their item as they slowly dispose of item in stages (e.g., lending out to friends) to get used to living without the item (e.g., Albinsson & Perera, 2009).

**Remuneration/Value.** Providers considering the path of disposition will deliberate over the value their object offers in disposition (e.g., Benaday, 1997; Sheth et al., 1991; Ture, 2014). Compensation can be driven by altruistic and/or non-altruist reasons (e.g., Harrell & McConocha, 1992). When it comes to the more altruistic option of “giving the product away,” Burke, Conn, and

35 Recall from Section 1.1.1 that ownership is ambiguous, so although legal ownership may not be transferred, there may be certain grades of power and/or psychological ownership provided to the Taker.

36 With some exceptions; for example, Resistant Disposition *can* result in temporary or permanent disposition through using storage facilities/services because although the consumer has chosen to “store” their product, they are giving their item up temporarily to another party and if they suddenly stop paying the storage company then the object’s ownership is permanently transferred to the storage company.

Lutz (1978) noted the difference between (1) Gifting – where the product is given to a known person (e.g., family, friends or acquaintances); and (2) Donating – where the product is given away to an organisation (e.g., the end-Taker is unknown). Similarly, Belk (2007) distinguished between ‘sharing in’ versus ‘sharing out:’

“Sharing out (Ingold 1986) involves giving to others outside the boundaries separating self and other, and is closer to gift giving and commodity exchange, while sharing in is closer to the prototype of sharing within the family in that it involves regarding ownership as common, such that the others are included within the aggregate extended self” (p. 725).

This distinction is a valuable dimension for the disposition definition. However, I suggest removing “sharing” as this limits the distinction to only temporary disposition because “sharing in and sharing out [...] do not transfer ownership” (Belk, 2015, p. 201). Instead, I suggest focusing on the underlying mechanisms driving all disposition decisions: interpersonal ties, compensation, and value. Disposition can therefore come in two forms: (1) *Providing In* - an altruistic and friendship-oriented activity driven by relational value (e.g., Ertimur et al., 2015; Norris, 2004; Ture, 2014) that envelops the extended self’s symbolic meaning of the disposed object between Provider and Taker; and (2) *Providing Out* - a reciprocated or commodity driven exchange between strangers which keeps the extended self exclusive to the Provider. I suggest CC initiates disposition mostly for the latter – exchange is likely to be (at least initially) between strangers and the extended self is more likely to be kept exclusive to the Provider. Thus, swapping and renting through online websites are primarily forms of Providing Out.

Providers who resell their items for monetary remuneration may differ in their invested level of involvement, falling on a continuum of low involvement (e.g., amateurs, sporadic) to high involvement disposition (e.g., professionals, repetitive) (e.g., Belk et al., 1988; Chu & Liao, 2007). Experienced consumers who are knowledgeable about the value of their possessions may come to objectify their dispossessed objects as “potential commodities” (Kopytoff, 1986) or “stock” (Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2009), and therefore seek to gain profits from their disposition activities.

Providers who are motivated to receive monetary remuneration from their disposition (e.g., Chu & Liao, 2007; Chudizan, 2015; Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2009; Green et al., 2001; Herrmann, 1991; 1997; Herrmann & Soiffer, 1984; Sherry, 1990) will typically have a reference price they require before selling their object (e.g., Ariely, Huber, & Wertenbroch, 2005; Brough & Issac, 2012). This remuneration is often higher than Taker’s willingness to pay because disposition often results in

psychological pain due to the “endowment effect” (assigning value to things merely because they are owned; also known as the “mere ownership effect” – e.g., Thaler, 1980) and “sunk cost” (e.g., Arkes & Blumer, 1985; Moon, 2001). However, experienced traders are less likely to exhibit endowment effects when compared to inexperienced traders. For example, empirical studies (e.g., Kahneman, Knetsch, & Thaler, 1991) have typically found that products acquired for eventual resale rather than use (or permanent ownership which is associated with the endowment effect; e.g., Morewedge et al., 2009) do not usually generate an endowment effect (Levy, 1992). The literature has not established how Providers may experience these effects in the case of temporary disposition or online swapping. For example, what happens if users buy or swap products with the future intention to rent or swap them out – will there be an endowment effect during their disposition valuation?

Although most Providers are motivated to optimise the value from their disposition and may seek remuneration from their efforts, Lemaitre and de Barnier (2013) found online resellers usually only gained modest financial gains which did not compensate for their efforts. Similarly, van de Glind (2013) found from an exploration of CC websites in Amsterdam that although respondents were motivated by financial benefits, remuneration was not the primary reason they used these platforms. Thus, resellers who are not experienced at making a profit in second-hand markets are likely to be motivated for other reasons as well (e.g., recreation, protest, and generative motivations).

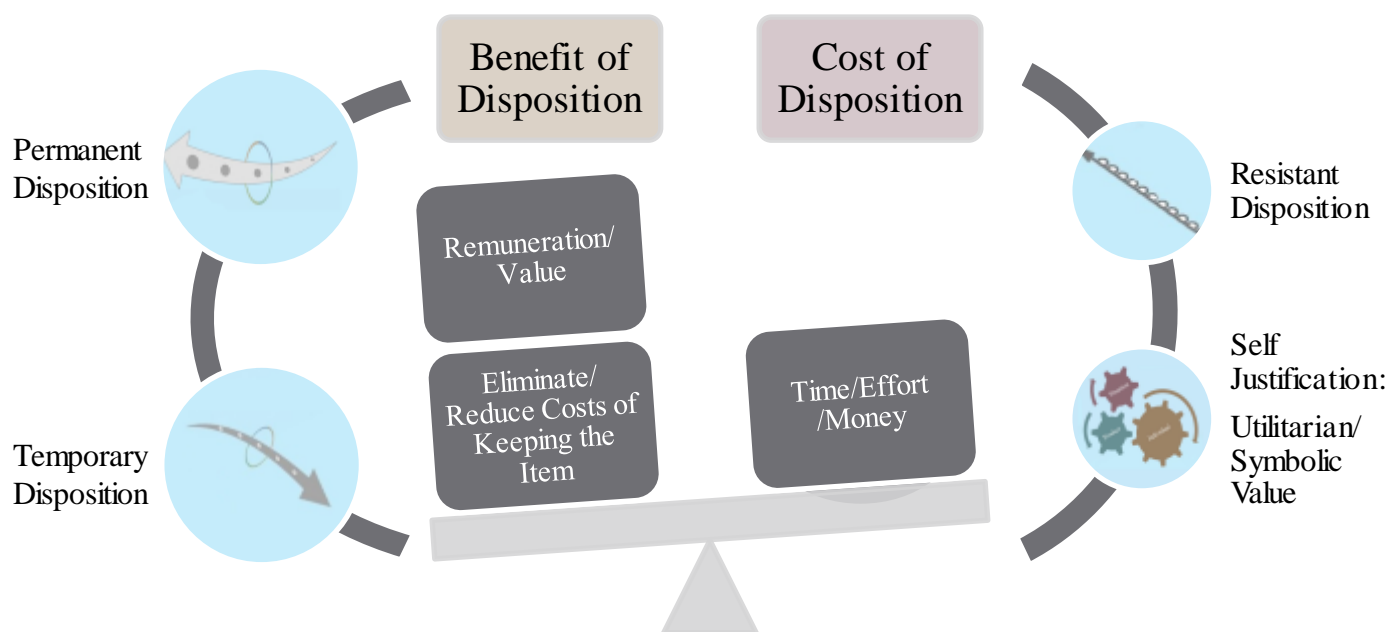
**Format.** Format refers to the outlet/place of disposition (e.g., offline or online, organisation or individual, anonymous or public, etc.). Convenience is said to be one of the most decisive factors for choosing a disposition format (Birtwistle & Moore, 2007; Derksen & Gartrell, 1993; Domina & Koch, 2001; Ha-Brookshire & Hodges, 2009; Shim, 1995). Thus, Providers are most likely to choose a format of disposition with which they are most familiar and have experience (e.g., Domina & Koch, 1999; Koch & Domina, 1997). Alternatively, some Providers in online auctions (e.g., Cameron & Galloway, 2005; Rafaeli & Noy, 2002) and garage sales (e.g., Herrmann, 2006; Herrmann & Soifer, 1984) have been found to be motivated by disposition as a recreational activity where Providers have a desire to socialise with others and have fun. When choosing a disposition place/person, Providers will also consider the trustworthiness and shared values of the Taker or intermediary so they can be sure their items will be taken care of appropriately (e.g., Lastovicka & Fernandez, 2005; Mitchell et al., 2009). For example, Lemaitre and de Barnier (2013) found online reselling was also motivated by protest factors (i.e., to make a political impact through their consumption), so Providers may choose a disposition outlet that matches their political concerns.

### 2.3.3 Disposition Process:

#### (3) Decision/*Action* (Resistant, Temporary, or Permanent)

The disposition decision for “outplacement” (see Ekerdt, 2009, p. 73) is ultimately made by weighing the efforts/costs of their disposition choice against the benefits as illustrated in **Figure 2.8**.

**Figure 2.8** Factors Influencing the Disposition Decision.



**Resistant Disposition.** The literature on product obsolescence suggests we live in a throwaway society of ‘out with the old and in with the new’ (e.g., Barr, 2004; Cooper, 2005a; 2005b). However, research suggests that beyond product packaging, food waste, and periodicals, our waste stream to the landfill has maintained a constant flow of proportion since the twentieth century (e.g., Lucas, 2002), with the majority of disposed objects being “either given away to charity, friends, and family, or sold” (Gregson et al., 2007, p. 682). Just as often as people give away or sell their belongings, people are also “quietly [forgetting] about them, letting them linger around in backstage areas such as garages, lofts, sheds, and cellars, as well as in cupboards and drawers” (Gregson et al., 2007, p. 683). This latter, hidden option is where Resistant Disposition emerges. Because the convenience of storage often exceeds the hassle of disposal, the first disposition choice to “keep the product” (Jacoby et al., 1977, p. 22) has been argued to be a dominantly taken route (e.g., Cwerner & Metcalfe, 2003). Indeed, when it comes to providing out, consumers have traditionally chosen to keep (store), donate, or throw away their possessions rather than put in the effort to make profits from their

unutilised things (e.g., Albinsson & Perera, 2009; Domina & Koch, 1998). For example, Bianchi and Birtwistle (2010) found a survey of consumers in Scotland and Australia most commonly chose to donate to charities (about 40%) or give to friends/family (about 20%) rather than sell their items (only about 5%).

Providers often abandon their original plans to dispose of objects and return to a previous stage in the disposition process (Roster, 2001). Thus, Resistant Disposition may also help explain why a consumer would choose not to dispose at all, and thus result in the idling capacity of objects (e.g., Cluver, 2008). The likelihood of disposition depends on the associated benefits and costs perceived by the would-be provider. If a provider views the object as having ambiguous “value-in-disposition,” they are more likely to feel an inability to dispose and thus resist getting rid of the object (Türe, 2014). Due to the dissonance experienced when facing the costs of disposal, a consumer may resist disposition by processes of self-justification and rationalisation techniques (e.g., Suarez et al., 2016). For example, reluctant disposers may convince themselves their object still offers value that is functional and/or symbolic (Belk, 1988; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Furby, 1978; Richins, 1994). This is especially the case for consumers exhibiting product retention tendencies that cause an aversion to dispose (e.g., Haws et al., 2011). For example, Coulter and Ligas’ (2003) characterisation of “packrats” can provide an insightful look at why consumers forgo temporary or permanent disposition and instead choose to hold on to their belongings.

The first reason for keeping possessions has to do with a functional, practical, aversion to waste, as “packrats often view disposition as a potential waste of money” as they “are mindful of the financial investment in their possessions, and conscious of being thrifty” (Coulter & Ligas, 2003, p. 40). Thus, keepers are more likely to seek ways of extending the useful life and investment value of their belongings through “planned anti-obsolescence” (Kinokuni, Ohkawa, & Okamura, 2010) by fixing and maintaining their things (e.g., Hanson, 1980; Haws et al., 2012), altering the objects’ intended use through use innovativeness (e.g., Giradi, Soutar, & Ward, 2005; Hirschman, 1980; Ridgway and Price, 1994; Scott & Weaver, 2014), or simply storing the object in case it could be used in the future (e.g., Bye & McKinney, 2007; Coulter & Ligas, 2003). Hoarders also tend to have a strong need to maintain control over their surroundings and feel responsible for caretaking their possessions, making the thought of disposition difficult to bear (e.g., Steketee et al., 2003).

The second reason may have to do with people placing symbolic value on their possessions. For instance, research has found packrats and hoarders more likely to perceive their stuff as an extension of their selves (e.g., Steketee, Frost, & Kyrios, 2003) or personified as a close friend (e.g., Cherrier &

Ponnor, 2012; Grisham & Barlow, 2005) as they have a strong “hyper attachment” with their possessions (e.g., Arnould, 2007; Fournier, 1998; Lastovicka & Sirianni, 2011; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988) due the object’s strong association with memories of people, places, and past events in the reinforcement of one’s sense of self (e.g., Cherrier & Ponner, 2010; Richins, 1994; Solomon, 1995).

**Temporary Disposition.** Although there have been many studies on temporary disposition practices without monetary remuneration (e.g., lending out and sharing items for free), the motivations and experiences of temporary disposition paired with monetary remuneration have yet to be investigated (Laitala, 2014) to the same extent as high-cost offerings like cars and housing spaces (it is likely that this uneven focus may be due to the fact that low-cost product service offerings are predicted to be unprofitable without other incentives – see Weber, 2016). This therefore represents a significant gap in the literature which my research sets out to explore (providing low-cost everyday tangible items on P2P renting websites). Piscicelli et al. (2015, p. 26) conducted an empirical case study of Ecomodo (a P2P renting website in the UK which has since been shut down after 8 years of operation) and found users were motivated by the following reasons: “‘to be green’ (32%), ‘to connect with my local community/lending circle’ (27%), ‘to get more out of the things I own’ (19%), ‘to save money’ (17%), and ‘other’ (5%).” However, it is still unclear how or why they might choose this type of disposition based on the nature of the exchange and experiences on the website.

**Permanent Disposition.** The literature provides more insight on *permanent* disposition practices. However, studies have primarily focused on Permanent Disposition through selling (e.g., Durif et al., 2014; Lemaitre & de Barnier, 2013; Murphy & Liao, 2013) or giving for free (e.g., Guillard & Bucchia, 2012a; Nelson & Rademacher, 2009), rather than swapping online, which represents another gap in the literature ripe for exploration. Providers may be deterred by the physical efforts of sorting and presenting things for disposal (e.g., Hetherington, 2004). Providers may also be deterred from disposition due to financial costs; for example with donation (e.g., Alcala, 2007).

Based on a study of sellers at garage sales and online auctions, Lastovicka and Fernandez (2005) introduced five divestment rituals that Providers go through before transferring their item: (1) Iconic Transfer – meanings of the object are transferred to an icon such as a photograph to retain its memory; (2) Transition Place – objects are placed out of sight and distanced from the daily self; (3) Cleansing – objects were cleansed of private meanings; (4) Storytelling – Providers told stories about the transferred object to either honour the memory of their positively charged possession or therapeutically

distance themselves from a negatively charged item; and (5) Shared Selves – Providers sought a connection with Takers in order to reassure themselves that their item would be appreciated.

### **2.3.4 Disposition Process:**

#### **(4) Post Disposition-Decision Outcome**

During the post disposition-decision stage, the continuum of duration may shift. For example, “permanent” disposition does not have to mean that it is *final*. Just because a person intends to completely get rid of something, does not mean it always happens (e.g., they could also buy it back, ask for it back, dig through the trash to get it back). Thus, the duration of disposition may change over time. Similarly, just because someone lends something out to someone, it does not mean they always get it back (thus, the item may be permanently disposed of in this case).

Further, consumers may also still perceive aspects of ownership long after permanently disposing of the object – for instance, “what is mine becomes (in my feelings) part of ME” (Isaacs, 1933, p. 225). Consider permanent disposition which is unintentional rather than voluntary – from losing it, misplacing it, having it stolen, or it being destroyed from a natural disaster (e.g., Delorme, Zinkhan, & Hagen, 2004; Young & Wallendorf, 1989). These scenarios may cause a consumer to feel nostalgia over the lost item and still see it in their mind as a possession that is still owned. For example, Jenkins, Molesworth, and Scullion (2014) found consumers were reluctant to buy a replacement for an item which had been permanently taken from them after a case of “lending gone wrong” because they still experienced a sense of ownership over the item. Thus, even though it was no longer in their possession and would likely never be in their possession again, consumers felt replacing the item would be wasteful – because they believed the good was out there somewhere in time – and was still theirs. Though my research focuses on *voluntary* disposition, it is still possible that online swapping or P2P renting can come with cases of involuntary disposition (for example if the rental Taker did not return the item or swapping Taker did not reciprocate the exchange). If involuntary disposition takes place, Providers may be faced with regret and no longer engage in that type of disposition. Alternatively, positive experiences may reinforce their disposition-decision into a habit over time.

This section has briefly defined the types of disposition a consumer may choose through the process of disposition. Of course, CC exchange involves both disposition *and acquisition*, so I now turn to the literature for consumer reacquisition (where second-hand goods are cast out by individual Providers).

## 2.4 (Re)Acquisition by Takers

Looking at acquisition through the same logic as Jacoby et al. (1977) with their categorisation of disposition (also see Jacoby, 1975; 1976 for similar acquisition categorisations), I suggest acquisition comes with three options (see **Figure 2.9**): (1) **Resistant** Acquisition: hold off on getting the object, where an individual can prolong their search and deliberate over their options for taking the proffered object (for example, see Luce, 1998); (2) **Temporary** Acquisition: temporarily get access to the object, either by borrowing or renting it from someone else; or (3) **Permanent** Acquisition: permanently acquiring the object, either by buying the item, procuring it through moneyless trade, or choosing to keep and claim ownership over a borrowed/rented item.

**Figure 2.9** Acquisition Continuum and Types of Takers.



Rather than repeat the consumer decision-making process for acquisition (especially because it is already well-established in the literature), in this section I will focus on the motivations and deterrents for acquisition *occurring in second-hand markets* (i.e., reacquisition).<sup>37</sup> Many studies have explored the general process of permanent reacquisition, such as through thrift consumption (e.g., Christiansen & Snepenger, 2005), second-hand consumption (e.g., Gregson & Crewe, 2003; Van Damme & Vermoesen, 2009), informal consumption (e.g., Williams, 2003), and alternative consumption as a commodity discourse (e.g., Prothero et al., 2010). However, swapping has been discussed sparingly. Meanwhile, temporary acquisition has been explored in the PSS literature as a usage-centred product solution of renting (however this has mostly been from the perspective of renting from businesses).

Following the same categories discussed by Paden and Stell (2005) on consumer disposition, the second-hand acquisition decision can also be explained using three influences: (1) Individual Characteristics, (2) Situational Factors, and (3) Product Qualities. These influences have also been used

<sup>37</sup> “Reacquisition” is commonly used to distinguish between first-level and second-level acquisition (e.g., Pierce & Paulos, 2011). Because I am only discussing second-level acquisition, I have used the terms acquisition and reacquisition interchangeably (unless stated otherwise).



to describe consumer acceptance of usage-oriented PSS offerings such as renting (however, “situational influences” are replaced with “service offerings” – e.g., Schrader, 1999).

### 2.4.1 Individual Characteristics

Coulter and Ligas (2003) argued that packrats may be more likely than purgers to shop via second-hand garage sales, swap meets, flea markets and other avenues because of their inclination to find bargains. Packrats may be more inclined to choose permanent acquisition because they have a preference for storing objects in case they can be used in the future (Coulter & Ligas, 2003).

Previous studies on reacquisition have indicated that finding ways to acquire used goods is “hard work” (e.g., Gregson & Crewe, 2003, p. 107; Pierce & Paulos, 2011, p. 2389) and usually limited to those “in the know” (Brosius et al., 2012, p. 5). For this reason, second-hand Takers may perceive first-level acquisition as “more seductive, convenient, accessible, [and] even necessary” (Pierce & Paulos, 2011, p. 2388). Thus, individuals who are more innovative, involved, and/or invested in exploring the marketplace for alternative ways to get items may be more likely to engage in reacquisition. Pierce and Paulos (2011) found invested reacquirers were more open and patient with resisting first-level acquisition’s offering of “control, immediacy and reliability” as they actually enjoyed the experience of disorganised consumption (p. 2391). Reacquisition often comes with more risks (e.g., no warranty or guarantees), so is likely to be less favoured by risk-averse consumers (Guiot & Roux, 2010).

PSS Takers have been argued to be more innovative (e.g., Sempels & Hoffmann, 2013) and likely to be attracted to different modes of acquisition. Moeller and Wittkowski (2010) referred to this as a “trend-oriented” mindset, where Takers are interested in renting objects in order to obtain new innovations and trending products on a regular basis. Indeed, usage-oriented PSS offerings can allow Takers to access a variety of new products more frequently at a lower cost (e.g., Baumeister & Wangenheim, 2014; Lovelock & Gummesson, 2004).

Takers may view their skills in acquisition as part of their identity, taking pride when they find bargains or interesting objects. Thus, reacquisition can be motivated by the need to brag to others for being a savvy connoisseur (e.g., DeLong et al., 2005) and a “smart shopper” (Guiot & Roux, 2010, p. 387).

Consumers who are politically active and concerned with consumption may be enticed by PSS offerings as an alternative to traditional markets – especially if they perceive their participation causes

less environmental, social, or economic harm than alternative modes of consumption (e.g., Baumeister & Wengenheim, 2014). Similarly, Pierce and Paulos (2011) identified a reacquisition orientation of “critical reacquirers” who choose to buy second-hand because of their social, political, economic, ethical, and/or environmental values.

## 2.4.2 Situational Characteristics

Guiot and Roux (2010) observed two situational motivations for second-hand acquisition: economic and recreational. Similarly, Brosius et al (2012) argued that consumers engage in second-hand acquisition for pragmatic (“it makes sense”) or hedonic (“it’s fun”) reasons. The prominently assumed motivation for consumers to engage in informal or second hand goods acquisition has traditionally been assumed to be out of economic necessity. Williams and Paddock (2003) speculated that middle class consumers have lost purchasing power in the past few decades, making second-hand bargain hunting on the rise. Thus, researchers have found that budget constraints, particularly in lower-income urban neighbourhoods, act as a primary reason for seeking second-hand goods (e.g., Gregson & Crewe, 2003; Hill & Stamey, 1990; Lemure, 2000; Pierce & Paulos, 2011; Williams & Windebank, 2000). However, even affluent consumers who are not monetarily constrained have been found to seek second-hand goods simply to save a buck and feel proud of getting a bargain (e.g. Bardhi & Arnould, 2005) and be seen as a “clever consumer” (Gregson & Crewe, 2003, p. 11).

Reacquisition may be motivated by the situational characteristics common to second-hand shopping (e.g., physical and social surroundings) such as the hedonic search for “unpredictable offerings, visual stimulation and excitement [...] and feelings of affiliation and social interaction” (Guiot & Roux, 2010, p. 384). Takers are often more interested in the *process* of reacquisition rather than the reacquired object itself (e.g., Williams, 2003) as they find value in “the thrill” (Raulli, 2005, p. 54), of “*the chase*”, and “*the search*” (Pierce & Paulos, 2011, p. 2389) for finding interesting things (e.g., Arnold & Reynolds, 2003), and also enjoy socialising with other people (e.g., Bardhi, 2003; Cook, 2005; Homans, 1974; Lawler, 2001). Alternatively, the chaotic surroundings and time-intensive unreliability of reacquisition outlets may deter Takers who do not have time for consumption as a recreation (e.g., Pierce & Paulos, 2011).

Although consumers may be open to temporary acquisition as an alternative to permanent ownership, the social and physical surroundings of society often dictate ownership (e.g., Schaefer et al., 2015; Rexfelt & Ornas, 2009). For example, Rexfelt & Ornas (2009) looked at consumer

acceptance of a few hypothetical use-oriented services (pay-per-view TV, car-leasing, and clothing rental) via focus groups and in-depth interviews. Some implications arose from their study. Because sharing is not ubiquitous and there are not many examples of PSS for consumers to compare by, they are often unsure whether this type of system will be right for them. Likewise, consumers are usually unwilling to change their habits too much due to the needed skill-development that new consumption habits might require (e.g., Vezzoli et al., 2015). Although there are a number of reasons against temporary acquisition, the findings in this study showed that participants are generally positive toward PSS offerings, but doubtful about the specific solution and how it will work. Specifically, issues of trust, complexity and uncertainty were discussed as deterrents to temporary acquisition.

Renting may, however, come with tangible sacrifices. For instance, inflexibility and inconvenient access may occur (Tukker, 2004; Tukker & Tischner, 2006). Additionally, rental services might be more expensive than traditional ownership in the long run as membership and pay-per-use fees add up overtime (Durgee & O'Connor, 1995). Intangible sacrifices might also arise with renting. The loss of private ownership indicates that we become dependent on someone else in order to get wanted resources (Belk, 2010). Furthermore, there is a general fear that there aren't enough goods to go around, implicit in the idea of resources as scarce. A German study revealed that a majority of respondents feel that if they share goods with others, they won't be able to access them for themselves (Hirschl et al., 2003), mirroring the findings of Lamberton and Rose (2012) and the "perceived lack of control" renters can face as discussed by Scholl (2006, p. 31) in regards to PSS and service encounters. Another sacrifice involves having a diminished experience with the product due to perceived risk. Consumers might be overly cautious with their rental products to avoid penalties for damage and thus not enjoy the consumption as much as normal (Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010).

Conspicuous consumption describes a 'Keeping up with the Jones' mentality, where consumers purchase "expensive goods to wastefully display wealth rather than to attempt to satisfy more utilitarian needs of the consumer, for the sole objective of gaining or maintaining higher social status" (Eckhardt, Belk, & Wilson, 2014, p. 807). Second-hand acquisition may be perceived as inferior for consumers that consume material goods to project their social position to others. Thus, second-hand and temporary acquisition may come with social risks (e.g., Schaefer et al., 2015), where the consumer may hide their mode of acquisition because they do not want to be seen by others as not being able to afford the acquired object (e.g., Baumeister & Wangenheim, 2014; Catulli et al., 2013). However, "in an anonymous society of strangers," we are often "unable to tell the difference between what is owned versus what is accessed for a short period of time" (Eckhardt et al., 2014, p. 810). In

addition, it has been argued that the values of conspicuous consumption have been shifting to a collective mindset of “liquid modernity” that is less concerned with attaining social status from ownership and more concerned with identities built from experiences (e.g., Bardhi, Eckhardt, & Arnould, 2012; Baumen, 2000; Rexfelt & Ornas, 2009; Sempels & Hoffman, 2013). It is unclear how these contentions are handled by renters or swappers utilising Collaborative Consumption websites.

### 2.4.3 Product Characteristics

Takers choosing a mode of acquisition will also be influenced by their perceptions of the product’s value. An exploration of offline second-hand markets revealed buyers were most motivated by finding “cheaper” objects at “fair prices” (Roux & Guiot, 2008, p. 71). Similarly, others have found Takers are motivated to buy second-hand because it offers products at cheaper prices (Woodruff-Burton & Wakenshaw, 2011), especially on second-hand clothing (e.g., Bauk, 2012; Roux & Korchia, 2006; Xu et al., 2014). Similarly, PSS Takers may be motivated by temporary acquisition because they perceive it to have a lower cost than ownership (e.g., Lamberton & Rose, 2012).

Some consumers may also choose secondary acquisition as a way to avoid buying “new” (e.g. Dobscha & Ozanne, 2001), as they find value in objects precisely because they have been used (e.g., *investment rituals*; see Gregson & Crewe, 2003). Consider Phoebe from the TV show “Friends” as an example. She refused to buy things from Pottery Barn because she wanted to “smell the opium fumes” wafting from the apothecary table, to imagine the history and meaning of objects, rather than become what Tyler Durden from Chuck Palahniuk’s “Fight Club” condemned as “a slave to the IKEA nesting instinct,” where individuality is lost and everyone’s living room eerily resembles the layout shown on page 15 of the latest catalogue. This need for uniqueness has often been found to be a reason for seeking goods via non-traditional outlets (e.g., Tepper, 1997).

By participating in a rental scheme, consumers may experience more product variety without the burdens of ownership (e.g. Baines et al., 2007; Lawson, 2011; Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010). These burdens include having the risks of product obsolescence (e.g. Bulow, 1986), as well as the responsibility of storing the product (e.g. Berry & Maricle, 1973), and the liabilities of “maintenance, repair and disposal” (e.g., Hirschl et al., 2003, p. 875; Reim et al., 2014). As rental Takers may not participate in the practices of appropriation with temporarily accessed objects (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012), renting may also reduce the burden of ownership. Renting can offer superior tangible and intangible benefits by providing more diversity and higher quality products (Mont, 2008a), access to

expensive products that would otherwise be unattainable (e.g., Baumeister & Wangenheim, 2014; Lamberton & Rose, 2012; Lovelock & Gummesson, 2004; Schaefer et al., 2015; Vezzoli et al., 2014), and more customised solutions so that the customer doesn't have to figure out how to make the product 'work,' be it with maintenance or other usability issues (Tukker & Tischner, 2006).

Bolton and Alba (2011) suggested that as consumers try to avoid wasteful purchases of items they would rarely use, they may choose temporary acquisition for items that are expected to have a high idling capacity. In a similar vein, consumers may want to seek a trial of products before making high involvement purchases in haste (e.g., Locander & Hermann, 1979). This dissonance avoidance by renting before buying has also been found to be a reason for sharing in toy libraries (e.g., Ozanne & Ozanne, 2011), purchasing on eBay (e.g., Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2009), and renting from organisations (e.g., Lawson, 2011).

PSS research has suggested that products need to be at a certain price level for consumers to see the value of renting instead of purchasing the product (e.g., Schrader, 1999). For example, Weber (2016) concluded that low-cost product service offerings did not offer Providers or Takers monetary value. The size of products may also affect a Taker's decision for acquisition. For example, some studies suggest bulkiness of large items like furniture may be perceived as too much of a hassle for acquisition through usage-oriented sharing systems (e.g., Besch, 2005).

Durgee and O'Connor (1995) argued that the person-object relationship is altered when an object is rented. In their exploratory examination of renting they found the behaviour to be a high involvement transaction with low post-purchase dissonance which is preferred when the need is a temporary one (Durgee & O'Conner, 1995). In addition, rental is an attractive option as renters prefer to put wear and tear on rental goods. Similarly, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) found that car sharing is guided by norms of negative reciprocity with consumers engaged in opportunistic behaviour at the expense of the object and other users. However, when the rental good is owned by a peer, how does this alter the person-object relationship as well as affect the relationship between the user and provider?

In an examination of automobile leasing, Trocchia and Beatty (2003) found that desire for variety, simplified maintenance, and social approval motivated this behaviour. However, as leasing offers extended possession utility, like ownership, it differs from short-term rental (Lovelock & Gummesson, 2004), which was explored in this thesis.

Finally, another renting deterrent may be "the notion that many products possess symbolic features and that consumption of goods may depend more on their social meaning than their functional utility"

(Solomon, 1983, p. 319), a concept made famous by Belk (1988) in his discussion on the “extended self.” Indeed, physical possessions can hold symbolic value to the point where owning products has been found to contribute to self-esteem (Tukker & Tischner, 2006) and self-definition (Kleine, Kleine, & Allen, 1995). For example, Schenk and Holman (1980) found that consumers sometimes use their possessions to influence how they appear to others. It would presume that by forgoing ownership (replacing ownership with temporary acquisition and access), consumers would lose their sense of self-concept/self-image and be unsure of how to portray their desired image.

Following this train of thought, perhaps the “we are what we have” consumers who define themselves through ownership (Belk, 1988, p. 139) might be less willing to rent. Consider Goffman’s (1959) argument that objects are “props,” and similarly, Solomon’s (1995) trophies metaphor where belongings “are an essential part of [an] individual’s identity[, working] like “trophies” [by] providing the owner with information about his or her accomplishments and [serving] to maintain social order by visualising vertical differentiation among people” (Solomon, 1999, p. 75). This idea was also touched on with Laverie, Kleine and Kleine’s (2002) findings on role identity and social groups. Scholl’s (2006) question about product service systems sums up this argument:

“What is – symbolically – left, when possessions have turned to a product service system, when your own car has been replaced by access to a car sharing fleet, when your own washing machine has been substituted by a launderette and/or a textile cleaning service, or when you have traded in your own pair of skis for the on-demand purchase of ski rentals?” (Scholl, 2006, pp. 30-31).

How can renting from our peers replace our materialistic views of possessions that hold social ties and symbolic meaning? How can we make access symbolic and memorable? Answers to these questions are likely to be instrumental in making the plight of ‘access over ownership’ a success.

This concludes the first two objectives of my non-committal literature review (framing the problem and looking at what had already been studied within the topic). The majority of my integrative literature review will be discussed within Chapter Four to create a better flow for my findings and reduce repetition. I now turn to the final and third step of the *non-committal literature review* – to engage in the philosophy, methodology and methods behind this study – discussed in the next chapter.

## (Section 3.1) Philosophical Foundations

Ontology (critical realism), epistemology (constructionism), and theoretical perspectives (interpretivism, pragmatism) are discussed to build a model of enquiry for this research (e.g. a window/frame to observe the phenomena).

## (Section 3.2) Methodology

Following the chosen theoretical perspectives, my methodology (grounded theory) is defined as the guiding framework which inspired the methods for this research project.

## (Section 3.3) Methods

An overview is provided for the qualitative methods used in this research: (1) Sources - members of P2P renting and swapping websites; (2) Collection - online interviews; (3) Analysis - thematic analysis; and (4) Evaluation of Quality.

*A Methodology provides a Window from Which to Observe the World...*

"By divers ways and windings did I arrive at my truth;  
not by one ladder did I mount to the height  
where mine eye rove into my remoteness.  
And unwillingly only did I ask my way  
—that was always counter to my taste!  
Rather did I question and test the ways themselves.  
A testing and a questioning hath been all my travelling:  
—and verily, one must also LEARN to answer such questioning!  
That, however,—is my taste:  
—Neither a good nor a bad taste,  
but MY taste, of which I have no longer either shame or secrecy.  
'This—is now MY way,—where is yours?'  
Thus did I answer those who asked me 'the way.'

For THE way—it doth not exist!"

Reference to Quote: Nietzsche, F. (2008). Thus spake Zarathustra: A book for all and none (T. Common Trans.), Project Gutenberg. Retrieved from: [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1998/1998-h/1998-h.htm#2H\\_4\\_0062](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1998/1998-h/1998-h.htm#2H_4_0062)

## 3.1 Philosophical Foundations

It is commonly accepted that choosing a research method, philosophical assumptions of reality and knowledge should be explored (e.g., Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Grix, 2001; Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000). However, Lee (2004, p. 2) made an observation that many “scholars are either unwilling to acknowledge or accept philosophy as serious” and pointed out the irony in this:

“One would suppose that people who hold the degree of doctor of philosophy would be familiar with philosophy and receptive to its perspectives” (p. 2).

Thus, it seemed logical that in order to obtain a doctorate in *Philosophy*, I first had to build a “sociological imagination” (Wright Mills, 1959, p. 5) of the historical shaping of human agency and structure. This section therefore attempts to convey the prevailing philosophical foundations of knowledge which underpinned my chosen methodology.

Crotty (1998) identified four elements of “scaffolding” for social research, suggesting researchers should consecutively: (1) Choose an epistemology (e.g., constructionism); (2) Decide on a theoretical perspective (e.g., interpretivism or pragmatism); (3) Adopt a methodology (e.g., grounded theory); and (4) Select a set of methods (e.g., interviews).

However, Crotty left out “ontology,” claiming it could be merged with epistemology because realism (an ontological concept) often implies objectivism (an epistemological concept). Crotty (1998) believed ontology and epistemology could not be kept separate, as “to talk of the construction of the meaning is to talk of the construction of meaningful reality” (p. 10). In other words, how can we separate what we believe to exist from the methods we use to determine what exists? Many scholars agree ontology and epistemology are a reflection of each other and offer no independent contributions (e.g., Schraw & Olafson, 2008; Smith & Deemer, 2000).

Many scholars alternatively believe ontological issues are what sustain epistemological assumptions in the first place (e.g., Smith, 2006). For example, recognising ontology as an antecedent to epistemology, Bhaskar (1998a, p. 206) asked, “What properties do societies and people possess that




make them possible objects of knowledge for us?”. Our beliefs about the real world are likely to affect what we seek to know, how we find out about it, the extent to which we take faith in our observations, and the reasoning we employ to verify it as “truth.”

However, Frazer and Lacey (1993) believed selecting an ontological stance (e.g., realism) does not necessarily have to lead to its complementary epistemology (e.g., objectivism).<sup>38</sup> I address this ontological-epistemological contradiction with a discussion of “critical realism” (a form of scientific realism), where Bhaskar (2008, p. 43) said “to be a fallibilist about knowledge, it is necessary to be a realist about things.”

To better understand these contradictions, I chose to explore ontology before following Crotty’s (1998, p. 5) four-staged research process (see **Table 3.1**), because according to Grix (2004, p. 59), ontology is “the starting point of all research.”

**Table 3.1** An Overview of my Research Foundations Process.



<i>Ontology</i>	<i>Critical Realism</i>
<b>Epistemology</b>	Modified Objectivism, Constructionism
<b>Theoretical Perspective</b>	Interpretivism, Pragmatism
<b>Methodology</b>	Grounded Theory
<b>Methods</b>	Semi-Structured Interviews

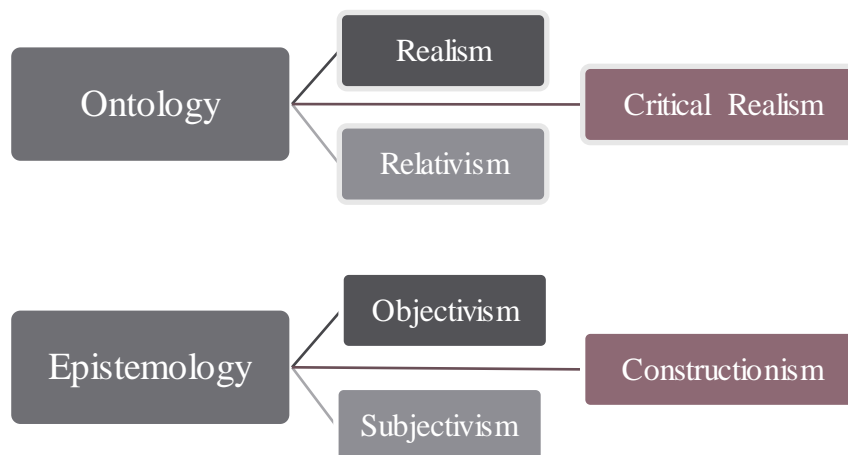
38 Frazer and Lacey (1993, p. 182) argued that “even if one is a realist at the ontological level, one *could* be an epistemological interpretivist [...] our knowledge of the real world is inevitably interpretive and provisional rather than straightforwardly representational.” This quote exemplifies the inconsistent use of terminology within philosophical foundations. “Interpretivism” in Crotty’s (1998) literature falls into the broader category of “Theoretical Perspective” rather than “Epistemology.” Thus, for purposes of consistency, I have to assume Frazer and Lacey (1993) were implying their argument to the epistemological foundations of interpretivism (e.g., subjectivism or constructionism).

### 3.1.1 Philosophical Foundations:

## Theoretical Perspective of Ontology and Epistemology

A researcher's "theoretical perspective" as defined by Crotty (1998) emerges from two philosophical premises: (1) Ontology, which deals with the nature of reality; and (2) Epistemology, which looks at how we can come to know this reality through the role of the researcher, the type of knowledge that can be sought, and causal forces of prediction (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The opposing ontological-epistemological perspectives to be discussed are summarised in **Figure 3.1**.

**Figure 3.1** Opposing Theoretical Perspectives for Ontology and Epistemology.



#### 3.1.1.1 Ontology describes the nature of *Reality*

Ontology describes a researcher's assumption concerning the nature of an object's reality. At a basic level, this can be broken down into two opposing extremes: (1) Realism, the nature of *being*; and (2) Relativism, the nature of *becoming* (e.g., Collier, 1994; Nightingale & Cromby, 2002).

**Realists** believe a 'single' *objective* reality exists independently from human interaction or interpretation; "the world is independent of the mental" (Callinicos, 1995, p. 82). A realists' truth is measurable, generalisable, and governed by natural laws. Realism therefore implies an array of facts is out there waiting (intrinsically presiding in the objects of study) to be discovered through physical senses.

**Relativists** on the other hand believe reality is socially *subjective* and only exists through individual interpretation, claiming there is no “one” correct reality, but rather everything exists as an accumulation of *multiple realities* and series of events. As an example, consider the story of Little Red Riding Hood (Mertens, 2003). Does this fairy tale have a happy or sad ending? It depends on who is telling the story. We would see completely different outcomes if we looked at the tale from the wolf’s perspective instead of Red’s. Thus, with relativism, comes an extreme resistance to claiming we can know a shared reality, because “every [person]’s experience is valid, not false, illusory or mistaken, and [...] all ways of making sense of the world are equally valid” (Seller, 1988, p. 365). Relativists believe reality is fluid and therefore elusive, and all objects and events are unique and changing.

**As an ontological example,**<sup>39</sup> consider the famous Tumblr post (referred to as “#thedress”) asking if a dress was “white and gold, or blue and black?” (McNeill, 2015). The question posed was



an ontological one because it sought to know our perception of the nature of colour – were we colour realists (only one interpretation was possible) or were we colour relativists (multiple interpretations were inevitable)? Because our shared meaning for black was different enough to gold, this query may have sounded like a joke (i.e. isn’t it obvious?). Thus, as preponderantly ontological *realists* for colour, many of us expected the answer to hold a universal truth<sup>40</sup> – it had to be

either black and blue *or* white and gold; it could not embody both options. This is because “blues” had been aggregated to a general class of “blue” according to their similarities – we had a shared assumption that “dark blue” was unique from “white.” But when an ocean of conflicting interpretations brought in a tsunami of the opposite interpretation (i.e. rather than a universal truth), an ontological panic ensued – “Me and my friends can’t agree and we are freaking the f[...] out” (McNeill, 2015).

Our standard *assumption* of reality (ontological realism) that there was only one colour interpretation possible in this situation had been shockingly challenged. I doubt the debate would

39 Original image of #thedress is available from multiple sources online (McNeill, 2015; Ungerleider, 2015).

40 The ontological question of “universal truth” was about perception of colour (the outcome of *what* our brains told us our eyes saw and if others around us had the same experience) as opposed to the process of *how* colour was seen – the latter question could carry a completely different set of *shared* ontological-epistemological *assumptions* than the first (for example if the question was a test for a condition of colour blindness). I make this argument based on the Zachman framework applied to “multi-perspective ontologies,” where ontologies are argued to encompass differing questions relating to relationships, processes, networks, motivations, people, and time (Kingston, 2008).

have gone viral had the question instead asked, “Is this dress gold or yellow?” because these colours are similar and could be more open to interpretation. With “gold or yellow” we would more willingly have accepted the ontological relativist claim that *it depends* (e.g. how do colours change over time and contexts? Who is being asked what colour it is? Perhaps our perception changes over time... etc.). But the question was asking about the dissimilar colours of black versus gold and dark blue versus white. So the contentions became exponentially abundant.

In the midst of the debate, many of us took a step back and engaged in an *epistemological* dialogue. We attempted to explain how our differing conclusions had been reached (e.g., Ungerleider, 2015). We considered the method of how we had come to believe that the dress was blue and black or white and gold – that is, was our established process of identifying colour (i.e., through the sense of sight) reliable? (e.g. Woodward, 1989). We asked ourselves what it meant for something to be blue, black, white, or gold. We pondered whether we could ever really know an object’s colour for certain. We wondered at the context of the question (e.g. an intangible picture of a dress rather than a tangible dress, the lighting of the picture, the pixels and quality of our computer screen, characteristics of the perceiver such as eyesight, colour-blindness or age and their relationship with colour, such as past learning or assumptions). Thus, through epistemological discourse we reconsidered our ontological perspective of colour perception – if our stance on the reality of colour perception was not purely realist or relativist, then what was it?

At the middle of the ontological continuum lies **Critical Realism**<sup>41</sup>, where it is acknowledged that although there is a reality ‘out there,’ human *agency* clouds this reality (Bhaskar, 1989). Keeping with Frazer and Lacey’s (1993) argument that selecting an ontological stance does not necessarily lead to its complementary epistemology, Maxwell (2012) suggested critical realism holds both a realist ontological view (i.e., a real world exists independently from our interpretations) and a subjective epistemological view, where “our *understanding* of this world is inevitably a construction from our own perspectives and standpoint” (Maxwell, 2012, p. 5). Thus, critical realism essentially rejects

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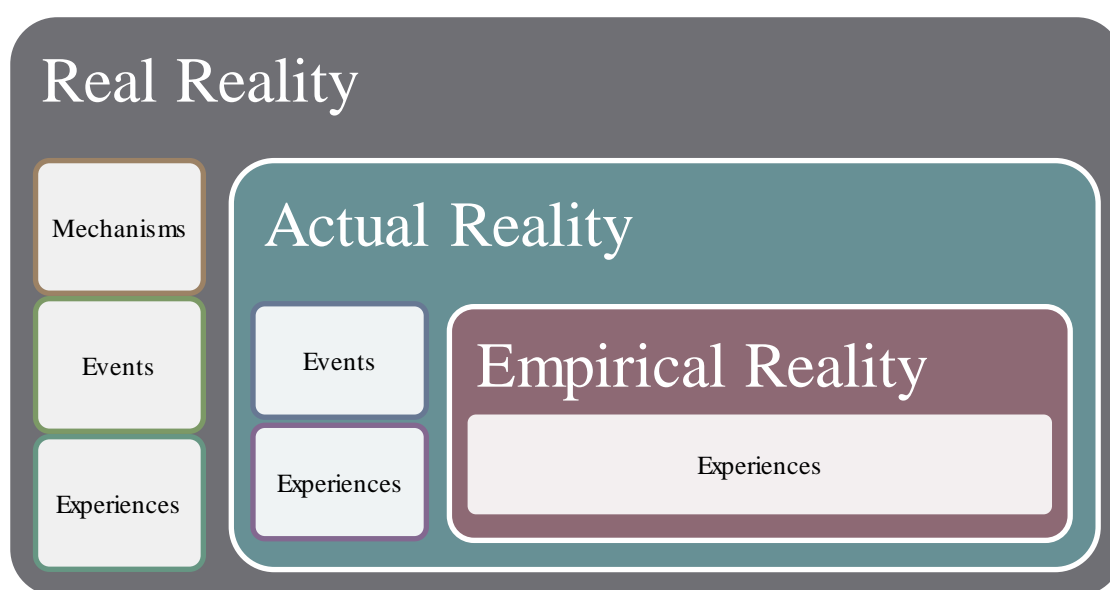
41 Another anti-realist/relativist position can be taken with Hammersley’s (1992) “subtle realism” which I have chosen not to adopt because it does not recognise that social structures and human agency are ontologically different – thus subtle realism has been argued to be ontologically shallow (i.e., because ontology and epistemology become “flat” and collapse together) as compared to the ontological *depth* that comes with critical realism (e.g., Banfield, 2004). Further, although beyond the scope of this discussion, I recognise that critical realism has also branched off to a number of different perspectives and followers; indeed, Bhaskar’s works have even departed significantly from his original positions (e.g., Maxwell, 2008). I have however strived to show the basic positions of critical realism with which I agree with and have adopted (or modified) as my ontological stance for this research.

holding any myopic postures of realism or relativism (Hammersley, 1992) because “all knowledge is partial, incomplete, and fallible” anyway (Maxwell, 2008, p. 164).

Critical realism suggests a single truth *may* exist, but because interpretations make it ambiguous and our interactions with it make it malleable, it cannot be directly or reliably accessed from only one perspective. However, we can, through the process of exploration and theoretical interpretation come to gain a reasonable level of *confidence* in generated knowledge of latent *patterns* (Hamilton, 2002). With critical realism, this process involves exploring the “transcendence” of ontology – that is, accepting reality’s existence beyond the naïve range of human experiences (i.e., through physical senses) while also accepting these experiences as still real and influential.

Transcendental realism points out the “epistemic fallacy” (Bhaskar, 1975, p. 36) which ignores that there are *two* aspects of science which must be reconciled in the definition of ontology: “(1) the social character of science” (transitive dimension) “and (2) the independence from science of the objects of scientific thought” (intransitive dimension) (Bhaskar, 1998b, p. 18). In other words, ontology needs to account for *both* mental and physical realities. Obviously, these must be observed from different conceptual perspectives, but they are in no way less “real.” Bhaskar (1978) introduced three levels of ontological depth: (1) *Real* – the “deep” underlying mechanisms which can generate events which can then be experienced; (2) *Actual* – events which can then be experienced; and (3) *Empirical* – experiences (See **Figure 3.2**).

**Figure 3.2** Critical Realism: Bhaskar’s Three Domains of Reality.



According to critical realism, all of these levels of reality are “real,” even though actual and empirical realities may be biased or incomplete – empirical reality is a part of actual reality which is a part of real reality. These dimensions are distinct from and greater/lesser than each other – for example, an event could occur (in actual reality) without being experienced (empirical reality) and there could be a mechanism or force existing (real reality) which does not manifest itself as an event (actual reality).

**To demonstrate the critical realist claim,** consider the apocryphal<sup>42</sup> retelling of an experiment on social conditioning: Five monkeys are put in a cage with a banana hanging up in the corner and a ladder leading up to it. As soon as a monkey goes to climb the ladder, all the monkeys are sprayed with cold water. After a while, the monkeys learn not to touch the ladder. But when a monkey is replaced with a new monkey without prior knowledge of the cold water outcome, this monkey obviously attempts to climb the ladder. Before reaching it however, this new monkey is attacked by all the other monkeys. After a few more attempts resulting in more attacks, the monkey realises he should not climb the ladder. One by one the original monkeys are replaced with new monkeys, and every time a new one attempts to climb the ladder, he is subsequently attacked by the others (even by



the new monkeys who had never been sprayed with cold water). Eventually, when all five monkeys have been replaced, even though none had been sprayed by the water, no monkeys go to the ladder leading to the banana. They don't know *why* they avoid the banana because they are not being attacked, so what is the reason? In laymen terms, “that’s just the way things are done around here!”

This phenomenon is known as “false consciousness,” whereby a social group “unwittingly misperceive[s] their real position in society and systematically misunderstand[s] their genuine interests” (Celik, 2007, p. 546).<sup>43</sup> The memes of aggression and ladder-banana avoidance were

<sup>42</sup> This story is one of those ubiquitously circulated internet memes where the original source has been hidden in a sea of retellings. Whether it is urban legend or truth is unclear, however many claim it was adapted and embellished from a study on Rhesus monkeys by Stephenson (1967). Smith (2012) proposed that its earliest print appearance was by Renesch (2000) however when I perused that book to double check this citation no such story could be found. With further searching, the earliest mention resembling this retelling of Stephenson's (1967) experiment is likely from Galef, (1976, p. 88).

<sup>43</sup> This idea of systematic replication – that norms can be passed from one group of subjects (who experienced the effect) to the next group of subjects (who did not experience the original effect) – was also found by Jacobs and Campbell (1961)

originally created due to a fear of being sprayed with cold water by an original set of monkeys, but as the original monkeys left, the stewardship of norms was passed to a new generation of monkeys (who had no participation in the creation of this ladder-banana avoidance). Thus, the predisposition to become aggressive toward monkeys going near the ladder became an inevitable part of *perceived* reality, but the *actual* reality behind this behaviour was a “social construction” (e.g., Berger & Luckmann, 1966). If we could ask the monkeys why they attack other monkeys for going near the ladder, they would be unable to provide a complete answer because they lack an omniscient “God’s eye view” (Putnam, 1981, p. 50) and are limited to their own experiences.

Applying critical realism to the monkey experiment, the “actual” and “empirical” reality exist where the monkeys are avoiding the ladder and banana (i.e., because they don’t want to be attacked or ostracised, they learned to dislike bananas, they fear ladders), but the perceived reasons behind this avoidance are distorted and incomplete.<sup>44</sup> This is because the hidden mechanisms from the “real” reality were not considered. This underpinning of “unbiased” knowledge discovery is where Crotty (1998) begins the research process of epistemology.

### 3.1.1.2 Epistemology describes the nature of *Knowledge*

Epistemology focuses on the relationship between knowledge and discovery, or more specifically: (1) What type of knowledge can be generated; (2) How and if causality can be claimed; and (3) The relationship between researcher and subject under investigation (Anderson et al., 1988). Epistemology is important to grasp as having an “awareness of the processes by which our understandings are fashioned can only strengthen our critical reflection” of truth (Porter, 2000, p. 144).

The first question of epistemology asks; *What type of knowledge can be generated?* Here, there is a distinction between (1) Objectivism – belief in nomothetic knowledge (e.g., general,

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with their study on autokinetic norms. Such findings point to the powerful effect that social norms can have on an individual's construction of reality.

<sup>44</sup> However, just because they are partial realities does not make them any less real. According to critical realism, all three domains of reality (real, actual and empirical) are “real”: even though actual and empirical realities provide only a partial (and therefore likely distorted) understanding of reality, they still add up together to make up the “real” layer of reality. The monkeys are still experiencing the inclination to avoidance of the banana and the ladder and they are still re-enacting the event of avoidance.

ever-enduring, bound by laws, immutable); and (2) Subjectivism – belief in ideographic knowledge (e.g., particular, historically determined, unique, developing) (e.g., Salvatore & Valsiner, 2010).

**Objectivism** (e.g., Rand, 1990) follows a realist ontology, where knowledge is governed by laws of nature. Objectivists follow Aristotle's Law of Identity, claiming everything there is to know resides within an object (e.g., "*a chair is a chair because it is so*") and the Primacy of Existence, where an object's existence takes precedence over consciousness, implying one's consciousness has no effect on an object. In other words, "only those knowledge claims that are based directly on experience (i.e., empirical observations) are considered important, useful and/or scientifically meaningful" (Peter & Olson, 1983, p. 118). Objectivists believe if knowledge is approached in the right way, researchers are able to acquire an objective truth by observing, measuring and quantifying reality. Objectivists believe: (1) Knowledge is nomothetic, following the correspondence theory of truth (i.e., findings are expected to be replicable); (2) Causal linkages do exist and can be predicted; and (3) The researcher is detached from the subjects of interest as an independent viewer perched atop their "privileged vantage point" for observation (Anderson Hudson & Ozanne, 1988, p. 512).

With **Subjectivism** on the other hand, it is believed from a relativist ontological standpoint that everyone has a different understanding of what we know. Subjectivists believe knowledge is ideographic, and comes from an individual's interpretation of an object (e.g., "*a chair is a chair because I say it is so*"). Subjectivists believe knowledge can only exist through social construction or interpretation. Following the epistemological boundaries, subjectivists feel: (1) Knowledge is idiographic, a subjective reality influenced by individuals; (2) Cause and effect cannot be distinguished because the world is complex and constantly changing but explanations of why phenomena occur can be obtained by exploring processes relative to time and place; and (3) The researcher interacts with the participants to create "a cooperative inquiry" (e.g., Heron & Reason, 2001).

The second question of epistemology asks; *How can causality be claimed?* There are two extreme views one can take when deciding how an idea, artefact, or technology exists through causality – (1) Social Determinism, which claims an object's status is due to external forces and



situations; and (2) Technological Determinism, which claims an object's status is exclusively due to internal factors and dispositions (e.g., Chiu, Hong, & Dweck, 1997; Ross & Nisbett, 1991).<sup>45</sup>

**Social Determinism** (also known as social constructionism, situationism) suggests objects arise from society through the groups who create, influence and use (or don't use) said artefact. Conventional views are created through learning; humans form perceptions and carry preconceived notions about "chairs" from past experiences with similar objects (e.g., an electric chair as a symbol of execution, a throne as a symbol of honour, or a wooden chair on a stage as a symbol for scopophilia and erotic dancing). Those privileged with a position of influence or structural power can even have a first-hand impact on its prospects and development (e.g., ergo-dynamic design). As another example, consider Bijker's (1995) discussion of the bicycle as a socially constructed technology. He suggested the bicycle's evolution from the dandy horse running machine to the brakeless velocipede to the now "modern" road bike was interwoven in influences from both users and nonusers of the bicycle who carry with them their own perceptions and past experiences.

**Technological Determinism** (also known as dispositionism) suggests an object is not only constructed and created from individuals (e.g., subjectivism, social construction, cultural determinism); but it also has the potential (as individuals create, use, or transform the technology) to impact agents of socialisation, and thus influences individuals over time. There are a multitude of arguments suggesting varying forms (i.e., hard or soft; see Oliver, 2011) of technological determinism having occurred, such as with the printing press (e.g., McLuhan, 1962), television (e.g., Williams, 1974), the Internet's effect on cognition (e.g., Carr, 2008), oppression hiding behind the guise of mass-

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<sup>45</sup> Andrews (2012) suggested that views are embedded exclusively in epistemology rather than ontology by giving an example of disease (p. 42). However, having an epistemological position on something has been guided by our ontological beliefs. Throughout the cyclical process of research our understanding of a disease evolves and socially conditions our ontological beliefs for that thing. For example, at one point in time we could believe through an ontological lens of realism that diseases are static and unchanging, thus from an epistemological point of view everything there is to know resides in the disease so if we strive to understand its properties then we can fight against it through invented medicines. However, through the interaction of technological artefacts with diseases, human agency can potentially cause the properties of diseases to evolve (e.g., the increased usage of antibiotics has correlated with bacterial resistance) and thus socially reconstruct our ontological belief of the nature of disease which in turn will impact our epistemological view (thus making these beliefs a cycle). This is where the consternation arises for trying to separate ontology and epistemology – because by the very virtue of taking an ontological stance we are giving a *belief* of the nature of reality, and as such, it can be changed by the outcomes of our research. Thus, at some point epistemology and ontology are bound to amalgamate due to a mixture of social conditioning and determinism. Although Bhaskar disagreed with the idea that "ontology is dependent upon epistemology since what we can know to exist is merely a part of what we can know" (1998, p. 29), his reasoning argument that "knowledge follows existence, in logic and in time" does not seem to account for a cyclical process of change – what if "existence" transforms? Critical realism helps fix this consternation by accepting that there are latent mechanisms (e.g., the situation where a disease would come to be resistant to antibiotics) which when activated can cause the transformation of real, actual, or perceived reality.

entertainment (e.g., Postman, 1987), and technological advances driving cognitive surplus (Shirky, 2010).

Using terminology from the literature, “determinism” can be described as having an enabling or constraining effect on society which is either “hard” (e.g., inevitable and autonomous; i.e., only technology or only social structures affect society) or “soft” (e.g., avoidable and experiential; i.e., social structures and technological artefacts constantly reinvent each other). I agree with Johnson’s (1998) assertion that solely taking a posture of social constructionism can be “inadequate when dealing with the politics or power of technology” (p. 96). I therefore embrace the ontological-epistemological beliefs of *soft* technological and cultural determinisms (i.e., they both interact together under the driving force of human agency in the reproduction or transformation of reality). This *interdependence* suggests reality is not only taking control of external objects or shaping society, but also that objects and societal structures can come to take control over human agency (through perceived constraints or enablements), so the effective reality of object and human agency become as one, intertwined and interdependent. To summarise, taking a technologically determined or socially constructed view as “either/or” fails to account for the entire picture of reality.

With this dualistic acknowledgement of social determinism acting side-by-side with technological determinism, I arrive at the middle ground in the epistemological debate – **Constructionism**<sup>46</sup> (as a form of “soft determinism”). The constructionist assumption makes the critical realist claim that “the way we perceive facts, particularly in the social realm, depends partly upon our beliefs and expectations” (Bunge, 1993, p. 231). Thus, although an objective reality exists, it needs to be viewed from different *perspectives* (e.g., time, place, point of view), as subjective interpretations cause individuals to *interact* with (thus impacting) reality. In other words, “human action is enabled and constrained by social structures, but this action, in turn reproduces or transforms those structures” (Porter, 2000, p. 143). Thus, a constructionist rejects the exclusive reliance on pure objectivism because “no finite number of empirical tests can ever guarantee the truth of universal statements” (Anderson, 1983, p. 19).

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46 The literature often confusedly uses “constructionism” interchangeably with “constructivism” (e.g., Lynch, 1998). I will not include a discussion on constructivism; however, I do note my rough understanding of the main difference: constructionism goes a step above constructivism because it shows that humans are not only *interpreting* different realities, but also *affecting* different realities with their actions and social negotiations. Thus, constructionism adds the assumption that agents of socialisation (e.g., social structures) have an effect on the creation of shared norms and meanings *as well as* the outcome of realities. In other words, constructivism diverges from critical realism because it holds the belief that social structures do not have causal powers (Peters, Pressey, Vanharanta, & Johnston, 2012). Constructivism ignores this mutual level of interpretation, negotiation, and reaction which causes ontological-epistemological disconcertion (e.g., Leppington, 1991).

Rather than following Burrell and Morgan's (1979) suggestion that subjectivist and objectivist epistemologies are mutually exclusive, constructionists believe subjectivity should be merged with an "objective mirror of reality" (Kakkuri-Knuutila et al., 2008). Constructionists hold similar epistemological assumptions as the subjectivist, but with an objectivist modification. Instead of assuming subjective multiple realities are mutually exclusive (thus rejecting the possibility of generalised knowledge), constructionists believe truths can be shared or overlap while observing phenomena through different *perspectives*.<sup>47</sup>

On choosing ontological and epistemological assumptions, I reconsidered the research questions from Section 1.2.4. A realist truth could reveal what types of non-users existed within the context of P2P renting and swapping; I could have gotten an overview of the most dominant user type by asking objective questions in a survey (e.g., Have you listed items to swap? How many times have you rented?). However, my quest for motivations and deterrents implied users would have different personal histories constructing their experiences. Additionally, because P2P renting and swapping websites had not yet been studied at the onset of this research, scales and terminologies pervasive to this experience were not grounded, so knowing what objective questions needed to be asked was considered problematic. Even more so, because P2P renting and swapping websites are far from mature, CC stakeholders and users would likely have been active in shaping, transforming and interacting with this technology to better fit their interests. These likely permutations and transformations indicate the findings of my research would reside within a hermeneutic circle that would shift over time with evolving CC network usage.

Thus, the ontological stance I maintained for the purpose of this research was critical realism – whereby I reject knowledge as being naively realist or radically relativist. With this ontological perspective, I acknowledge that a set reality of motivations, deterrents, experiences, and user types exist. However, I also stipulate this reality needs to be viewed from different perspectives and may shift over time. In other words, "there can be more than one scientifically correct way of understanding reality in terms of conceptual schemes with different objects and categories of objects. [...] Since no God's eye view standard is possible, that is the best we can do – and it's pretty good" (Lakoff, 1987, p. 265).

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47 Another example of the importance of "perspectives" can be illustrated by the infamous poem which discusses Hindus giving their first impressions of an elephant in a dark room (Rumi, 1995). Because the Hindus are relying on touch and they do not see the entire elephant, they form interpretations coming from varying perspectives (e.g., the trunk as a water-pipe, the ear as a fan, the leg as a column, the back as a throne, the tusk as a sword) which must be added back together if we are to get a fuller understanding of the whole elephant.

The final question of epistemology asks; *What is the role of the researcher for discovering knowledge?* (i.e., are they detached or do they collaborate with the subject to achieve knowledge?).<sup>48</sup> As discussed in Chapter Two, a *comprehensive* review of the literature was avoided to minimise pre-conceptions prior to undertaking this study. However, through my pre-understanding of theoretical perspectives, I was bound to carry a latent framework guiding the manner in which my final themes were presented. Indeed, “philosophically speaking, theory cannot simply ‘emerge’ from data, because interpretation and analysis are always conducted within some pre-existing conceptual framework brought to the task by the analyst” (Pidgeon & Henwood, 2004, p. 628).

I agree my philosophical assumptions may have impacted my final data set and analysis. Thus, to better disclose the process I followed for discovering knowledge, I created a model which summarises my ontological-epistemological beliefs, and can therefore act as a self-disclosure to the my “sense-making efforts during theory building” (Anderson & Kragh, 2010, p. 50).

I created this model during data analysis as a Theoretical Diagram<sup>49</sup> which could address my first research question (i.e., “What is the Nature of the experiences derived from P2P renting and online swapping?”). It was upon revisiting my methodology chapter that I realised this model could also be used to summarise my philosophical assumptions, and I therefore decided to introduce my model here (Section 3.1.2) as a research foundation rather than wait until the discussion.

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<sup>48</sup> Ross and Nisbett (1991) insightfully explained the discovery of knowledge and the role of the researcher using ontological terms and an “old joke about the three baseball umpires [...] discussing their work. The first says, “I call ‘em as I see ‘em.” The second says, “I call ‘em as they are.” The third says, “They ain’t nothin’ till I call ‘em.” Our contention is that, like the second umpire, most people are philosophical realists, with little appreciation of the extent to which their own cognitive processes have contributed to their judgments. Insight into the interpretive nature of judgment such as that shown by the first umpire is rare, let alone the extreme subjectivism of the third umpire” (p. 12).

<sup>49</sup> A feature of grounded theory, discussed in Section 3.3. This model is a product of my data and findings. It was continuously reworked and changed over the course of this study as incoming data refuted or invalidated past versions of the model. Thus, this model was a work in progress until I could be sure that it had a good “fit” to explaining my data.

### 3.1.2 Philosophical Foundations:

## A Model of Theoretical Perspectives

To summarise my philosophical exploration, I offer an ontological-epistemological theory that grounded my inquiry (see **Figure 3.3**), which includes the following components: (1) Manifestations of Reality; (2) Layers of Reality; (3) Individual Agency Mechanisms; (4) Structural Agency Mechanisms; and (5) Frames of Inquiry.



**Manifestations of Reality.** As influenced by Andreasen's (2002) social construction theories<sup>50</sup> and Orlikowski's (1992) agency-structure theory,<sup>51</sup> I suggest three *Manifestations* of Reality: (1) Individual Self, which encompass a person's unique mix of physical characteristics, mental dispositions and personality; (2) Technological<sup>52</sup> Artefacts, natural or manmade objects, which through their *usage* and design come to embody shared meaning and become structurally embedded in the environment; and (3) Society – comprised of actors, laws, social institutions, and social norms which make up the situational stage of our environment.



**Layers of Reality.** I also propose four *Layers* of Reality: (1) Perceived Reality, which are subjective interpretations of experiences observed by the researcher or the individual subject of interest; (2) Desired Reality, which represents the intended or projected state of the dimensions (e.g., *Nirvana* as an aspiration of Individual Agency, *Magic* as an aim for Technological Artefacts; and *Utopia* as an ambition for Society); (3) Actual Reality, which represents outcomes that have been directly observed to come out of the “black box” (e.g., Pinch & Bijker, 1987; Winner, 1993); and (4) Structural Reality, which represents the “deep” process and organisational structures of our environment which transmit individual, social, technological, or natural deterministic mechanisms that come out of the *Black Box*.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Andreasen (2002) discussed three social construction theories: (1) Personal influences (e.g., anticipated outcomes unique to the individual), (2) Societal influences (e.g., social norms, cultural movements), and (3) Structural influences (e.g., physical or legal infrastructure, situational factors, website capabilities).

<sup>51</sup> Orlikowski (1992) discussed how human agency interacts with technology within an institutional context.

<sup>52</sup> Technology should be defined here as the “way in which social groups provide themselves with the material objects of their civilisation” and “the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes” (“Technology”). Thus, I am not only looking at the technology as an isolated artefact but also as an artefact in *use* for a desired outcome.

<sup>53</sup> Winner (1993, p. 365) explained the “black box” concept as “a device or system that, for convenience, is described solely in terms of its inputs and outputs. One need not understand anything about what goes on inside such black boxes. One

Essentially, my model suggests phenomena have different ontological “locations” (e.g., Layers of Reality) and therefore researchers must first determine in which realm (or realms) the phenomena resides before conceptualising data into categories through epistemological analysis.

Upon exploration of my proposed *Layers of Reality* in the literature, I found convergence<sup>54</sup> with Bhaskar’s (1978) and Pratten, Ackroyd, & Fleetwood’s (2000) descriptions of “the real,” “the empirical,” and “the actual.” “The real” is similar to Desired and Structural Reality as it is made up of powers and tendencies that drive events, while “the empirical” matches Perceived Reality because it constitutes the current-state experiences and perceptions of actors engaging within the three manifestations, and “the actual” mirrors Actual Reality as it encompasses actual observable events and actions. These layers can also be thought of as “being” in a perceived reality, “doing” activities in actual reality, and “having” a Desired Reality (see framework presented by Huffman, Ratneshwar, & Mick, 2000, p. 14).

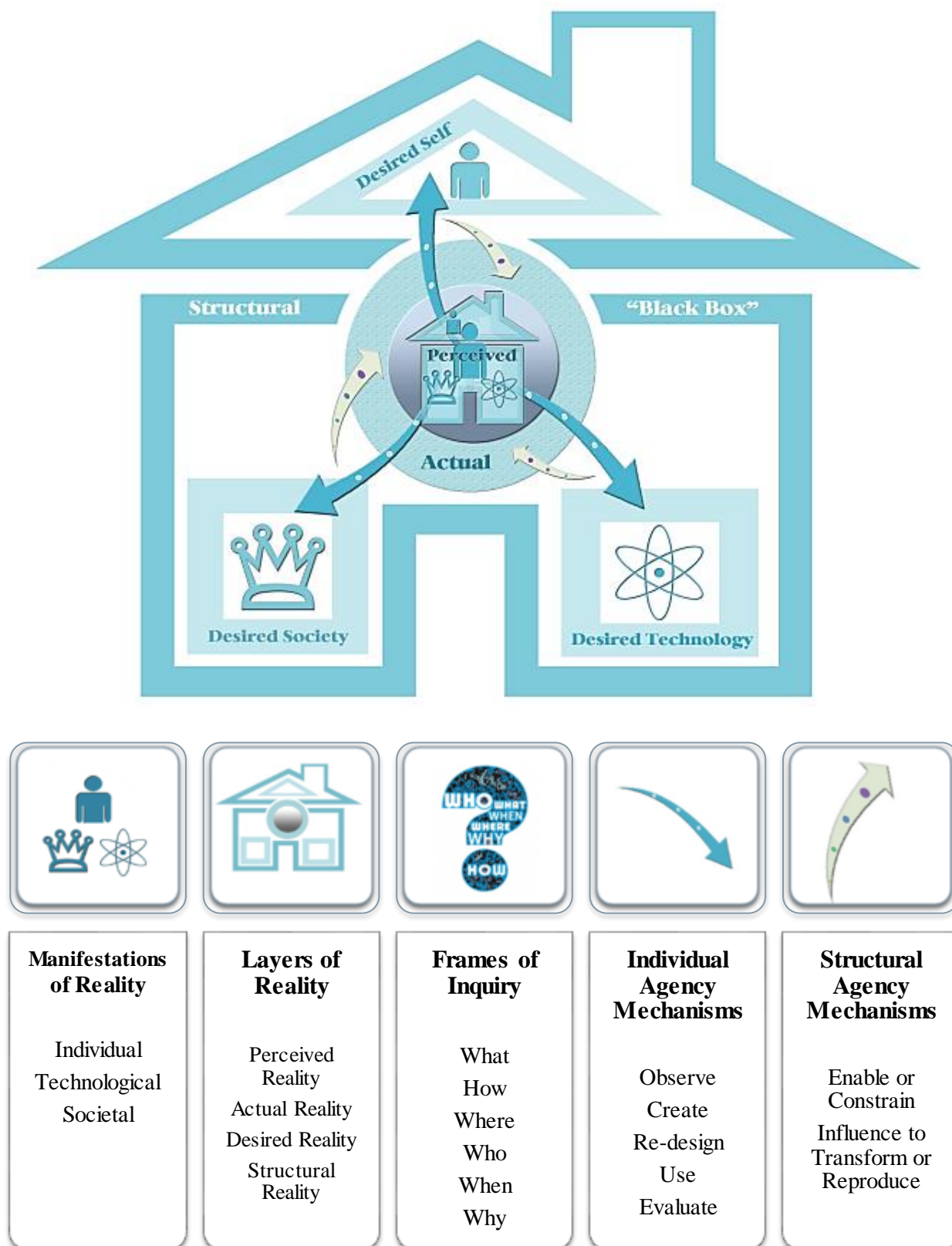
I also found similarities with Goldkuh’s (2002) ontology framework of socio-instrumental pragmatism (SIP),<sup>55</sup> which makes the distinction between different ontological categories of humans (individual self), human inner worlds (Perceived Reality), human actions (Actual Reality), artefacts (technological artefacts), the natural environment (Structural Reality), and symbolic objects or signs (which I did not include as a separate manifestation or layer of reality).

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simply brackets them as instruments that perform certain variable functions.” I use this term in my definition to reiterate my epistemological belief that we cannot get a bird's eye view of causality. So any findings that ask “Why” “Actual Reality” occurs (e.g., Perceived and Desired Reality) can be considered as theory-laden facts (i.e., educated guesses or propositions of the whole). This is because mechanisms of “the deep” (e.g., Pratten, Ackroyd, & Fleetwood, 2000, p. 111) which drive Actual events are hidden inside a relativist sphere of individual perceptions that make up social structures and have been constructed through time. These experiences can be fleeting, biased, and intangible. We *can* open the black box and look inside, but there will be a network of compartments - some will be visible, some honest, others deceptive, some will be visibly locked, and then there will be many more which are hidden in the deep as a set of secret compartments which we do not know exist.

54 I actually was unaware of ontological depth before I began my data analysis and only discovered Bhaskar's (1978) three reality domains *after* making this model. I had just assumed from my understanding of the world and my ontological-epistemological assumptions that there would be different layers of reality and that would explain the variance between nomothetic and ideographic knowledge. I believe this fact strengthens the validity of my model because rather than just being a “consumer” of Bhaskar's knowledge claims, I independently “produced” these knowledge claims through my own ontological-epistemological beliefs (and from my research findings) which happened to match some of the underlying concepts of his model (which I have now included in my Methodology discussion). However, I do note some deviance from his model because I am looking more closely at social and technological determinisms rather than natural laws (i.e., adding an individual Desired Reality layer). This is because I am not interested in the mechanisms of natural events (e.g., earthquakes) or deterministic structures (which are beyond my discussion), but instead want to focus on the mechanisms of human action and agency (e.g., individual motivations).

55 I did not find this framework until after I had created my model and was searching the literature for similar or diverging ontological models and frameworks.

**Figure 3.3** A Model of Theoretical Perspectives.



**Individual Agency Mechanisms:** Arrows coming out of Perceived Reality represent the driving force (mechanism) that motivate actors as they compare their observed Perceived Reality and choose to create, use, design, evaluate, and re-design technology, individuals, and society.



**Structural Agency Mechanisms:** Through the outcome of individual agency mechanisms, “events” take place in the Actual Reality layer which in turn come to transform the perceptions held in the Perceived Reality layer – from here, transformation (change) or reproduction (stability) of the current perceived and desired state occurs.



**Frames of Inquiry.** I embraced the multi-perspectives framework of ontologies (Kingston, 2008), where six “epistemic referential questions” (Kearsley, 1976, p. 351) can guide inquiries: (1) What - characteristics that describe and define objects, ideas, or things; (2) How - the actions, processes or functions these things undertake; (3) Where - the place or context in which these things reside, perform processes, or connect to other things; (4) Who - the roles, responsibilities, rights, and interactions of people involved or affected; (5) When - the time period and frequency of inquiry; and (6) Why - the motivations, causes, justifications, and objectives for these processes, functions, places, people, or things. Although listing out these questions may seem inane, they have been touted in the literature as essential ingredients for making “good theory” (e.g., Whacker, 1998; Whetten, 1989). These are also broad enough to avoid preconceptions while still acting as a guide for data collection, saturation, and epistemological confirmation in analysis.



**Individual Agency Mechanisms.** Looking at **Figure 3.3**, the three manifestations (Individual, Technological, and Societal) collide as manifested phenomena at the central null point of the tri-axes; this is the heart of the model, where the Perceived Reality layer presides. Here, actors engage with one another using natural and manmade objects within a natural and socially constructed setting. This is the “current” or existing state of actors (human agency; individual self), props (technological artefacts), and societal backdrops (natural environment and social institutions). Perceived Reality can also be labelled as “the definition of the situation” (Thomas, 1978, pp. 58-59) where prior “to any self-determined pattern of behaviour there is always a stage of examination and deliberation.” In accordance with the “regulatory focus theory” (e.g., Higgins, 1997) and “problem recognition” (e.g., Bruner II & Pomazal, 1988), pain-avoiding, pleasure-seeking actors



either continue to *reproduce* this current state, or they attempt to move to a desired state by *transforming* their current reality. Gaviria and Bluemelhuber (2010) explained the process of transformations:

“Events that impact on our life, such as important transformations, are typical moments that bring us to ‘re-write’ our life projects in order to follow new perspectives, from which we appraise our story line. Divorce, expatriation, marriage, motherhood, retirement, and social mobility are typical events leading to such transformation. These alternative appraisals, or perspectives, confront us with the question: Do I want to continue with the current version of my personal narrative or do I want to strengthen other paths in my life?” (p. 131).

This shift along the axis to the Desired Reality layer can go in any combination of directions (e.g., through creation, use, or design of technologies as enablers; reinvention of human dispositions (e.g., as a way of avoiding cognitive dissonance); and/or by designing social structures as enforcers or enablers). Thus, the “realities” (perceived, desired, and actual) this model embodies should be taken as a self-reproducing cycle that shifts with time and context.

As in the critical realism model of emergence, “Desired Reality” must be looked at as a collection of *tendencies* which may “exist unexercised” (Sayer, 2000, p. 12) and therefore not occur in Actual or Perceived Reality. That is, actors have latent tendencies (which can change under different circumstances); similarly, any objects, structures, or societies created and used by actors have properties which have the power to constrain or enable said actors. These enablements and constraints can be imagined as a constructed barrier which impacts an actor’s perception of how easy an action can be performed (e.g., Ajzen’s Perceived Behavioural Control) and thus whether or not they engage in action.

Thus, just because an individual has the motivation to create, use, or design an aspect within the three manifestations does not mean that they *will* engage in this activity. However, just because a change is not *observed* or manifested does not mean that these intentions are not real. In other words, Actual and Desired Reality show that the bridge between thought and action is not always connected – thus “the human psyche is an open system, [and] attitudes should be regarded as tendencies, rather than iron determinants” (Porter, 2000, p. 148).

On the path between Perceived and Desired Reality lies Actual Reality, where users of the system engage in acts of *consummation*.<sup>56</sup> This layer of “actions and events” is distinct from the Perceived Reality layer of “experiences” because “events can occur without being experienced” (Pratten, Ackroyd, & Fleetwood, 2000, p. 111). To think of it in another way, Perceived Reality encompasses individual experiences, whereas Actual Reality encompasses *all* reality that is happening “out there.” For example, when a tree falls down in a forest (Actual Reality) and there is no one there to hear it (Perceived Reality), this does not mean that it did not make a sound. Just because an earthquake happens (an event), does not mean that it is perceived by all (an experience). However, those that *do* perceive or experience an event will have their actual and desired states affected, which will in turn drive their actions to be manifested as events in the Actual Reality layer, and so the cycle of transformation or reproduction should in theory continue indefinitely.

**To summarise the ontological-epistemological points in this model,** Perceived and Desired Reality are driven and manifested through individual human tendencies, assumptions, and dispositions (e.g., leaning toward the ideographic knowledge and relativist realities side of the continuum) and the Structural layer contains natural laws and deterministic structures. Actual Reality comprises of objective events that can occur through either individual agency or structural agency (i.e., more characteristic of the nomothetic knowledge and realist realities) – these events then come to transform or reproduce the Perceived, Desired, and Structural realities. Put another way, the individual and structural mechanisms in the black box affect all realities as “the individual components arrange themselves as if prompted by an invisible hand, but conversely it is these individual systems that in turn create this invisible hand by their cooperation” (Haken, 1984, p. 19). Because this model is an open system and there are numerous mechanisms always in play, the *intended* reality of structures (e.g., desired) is never actually reached. In other words, “individuals acting according to their own particular criteria may find that the resulting evolution of the system may carry them in an entirely unexpected direction, involving perhaps qualitative changes in the state of the system” (Allen & Sanglier, 1981, p. 168).

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<sup>56</sup> I use the term “consummation” to summarise the internal forces driving the Actual Reality layer. I point out that consumer research should come down to one simple concept: consummation; thus “we are just statistics, born to consume resources” (Gaither & Cavazos-Gaither, 1996, p. 262). In the sense that we are all consumers seeking to fill a need, satisfy a want or attain some specified goal, we are all striving to reach consummation, or as Holbrook puts it, “attaining customer value or achieving satisfaction” is therefore “the central core of the concept of consumer research” (1995, p. 88). According to Holbrook, “almost everything one does involves consumption” (1995, p. 101) so this research model focuses heavily on the activities driving consummation. Note here that attaining value or achieving satisfaction could simply mean avoiding dissatisfaction (see regulatory focus theory: Higgins, 1997).

**To illustrate the importance of separating Layers of Reality**, I revert back to the story of the Capuchin monkey experiment introduced in Section 3.1.1.1. The Perceived Reality was the experience of being sprayed with cold water, a “current perceived state” that the monkeys did not desire. Their discomfort over the cold water experience drove the pain-avoiding monkeys to recognise a perceived “problem” that needed to be fixed. This caused them to construct the idea of a Desired Reality in which they would no longer experience this discomfort.

The monkeys had three action pathways to achieve this outcome; they could: (1) Attempt to transform their individual disposition (e.g., either *mentally* through cognitive dissonance, mind over matter, it’s just cold water, toughen up, being sprayed with cold water is a form of bravery and strength; or they could attempt to *physically* change themselves through strength training or agility to avoid being sprayed by the water), (2) Create, redesign, or use a technological artefact to protect them from the cold water or to get to the banana without going near the ladder; and/or (3) Create a social norm of punishments (or rewards) to stop all monkeys from going near the ladder and thus prevent future instances of being sprayed with cold water. In this example, the monkeys enacted the third option by creating a crude legislative power enforced by inter-monkey violence.

Remember, actions can occur without being experienced; thus when the new monkeys arrived, they were oblivious to the original experience that caused these actions. The Actual Reality of monkey punishments therefore had to be learned by the new set of monkeys – thus the new set of monkeys had their original proclivity to go near the ladder and retrieve the banana *transformed* to that of a proclivity for ladder-banana avoidance. This is because if the monkeys act in discord to the constraints of Actual Reality, they will experience the *real* consequences of inter-monkey violence. However, because this model is an open system, these monkeys are not bound to be deterministically controlled by this social norm forever. That is, if future monkeys have a desired state to get the banana (Desired Reality) which is higher than their desired state to avoid violent punishment in their current state (Perceived Reality), then the cycle of transformation begins again – the monkeys will endeavour to solve this problem by changing their current state through individual agency, technological creation/use, and/or societal intervention (i.e., activate change through Actual Reality).

**This model collaborates with my ontological-epistemological assumptions** (to be summarised in Table 3.2). Firstly, technological artefacts and stage settings are continuously created and redesigned by individuals for the purpose of consummation (i.e., to intersect desired and actual states) and secondly, they can be reproduced, transformed, or destroyed by individuals. The first point

is fundamental to the critical realist claim that an object's existence is dependent on its own objective properties *as well as* subjective external forces. Further, rather than merely *reacting* to outside influences (e.g., determinism), humans are constantly *interacting* and shaping their environment (e.g., constructionism). The second point leads to my claim that technological artefacts and constructed settings are only efficacious or influential when individuals *use* them. It is through the process of use that perceived existing (current-state) stage settings can either be reproduced (e.g., current norms are assumed) or transformed (e.g., current norms are enhanced or rejected).

**In theoretical terminology, this model conforms with critical realism** because it adheres to the “transformational model of social activity” – it emphasises the claim that rather than creating society from scratch we are born into a reality with pre-existing structures that can only be “reproduced or transformed in our everyday activities” (Bhaskar, 1989, p. 4). Further, the model also demonstrates my epistemological view of (1) generated knowledge (we can take a context-specific snapshot of a reality where influences/impacts are frozen in time as a *process* of understanding reality) and (2) causality (with so many arrows showing multiple impacts and influences occurring, the world is too complex to distinguish a bird's eye predictive view of cause and effect; we can only achieve an understanding of *tendencies* as forces that push toward Actual and Desired Realities). Because individuals are constantly reproducing and transforming technological artefacts and social settings (as well as *being* reproduced or transformed by them through constraints and enablements affecting action), “the causal power of social forms is mediated through social agency” (Bhasker, 1989, p. 26), and therefore inaccessible. In other words, “constant conjunctions at the actual level, or their observations at the empirical level, are neither necessary nor sufficient to establish causal relations.” (Pratten, Ackroyd, & Fleetwood, 2000, p. 111). The model implies that the purpose of this research sought “not only to uncover relevant conditions but also to determine how the actors under investigation actively respond[ed] to those conditions, and to the consequences of their actions” (i.e., transformed or reproduced Perceived Realities) (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 5).

With the building blocks of my theoretical perspectives set firmly in place, I now turn to the task of selecting a chosen research tradition (commonly referred to as “paradigm”) that glued together my ontological and epistemological views and guided my choice of methodology.

### 3.1.3 Philosophical Foundations: Choosing a Research Tradition

The term “paradigm,” is at a loss for a stable definition in the literature and proven problematic for many scholars (e.g., Masterman, 1970; Morgan, 2007; Yu, 2006). Thus, for the purposes of this discussion, I refrain from using the term “paradigm” and instead use a more pragmatic alternative, such as Crotty’s (1998) “theoretical perspectives” or Laudan’s (1977) “research tradition,” to describe my research views. This is to emphasise my belief that theoretical perspectives make up an epistemological and ontological worldview that *inspires* rather than *constricts* researchers to “a system of beliefs, including values, which serves a particular group’s interest” (Seller, 1988, p. 366). I therefore chose to adopt a mix of ideologies which fit my data and philosophical assumptions rather than trying to force them into a set of pre-determined exemplars.

Instead of discussing a list of possible “paradigms” and worldviews to choose from, I provide a continuum of theoretical perspectives, where at one end lies positivism, and at the other interpretivism.

**Positivism** is rooted in the assumptions of ontological realism and epistemological objectivism. A positivist tradition allows researchers to describe (rather than explain) social phenomena through correlations between dependent and independent variables. I chose to reject a positivist perspective because from my critical realist perspective, I assume explanations of empirical events “cannot be elicited through a deductive, positivist approach, because the social world is not closed like a laboratory but open to a complex array of influences which change both temporally and geographically, often in unexpected ways” (O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2014, p. 4).

**Interpretivism** on the other hand follows constructionism, with an axiological goal to attain an “understanding” (e.g., Hudson & Ozanne, 1988) of “culturally derived and historically situated *interpretations* [emphasis added] of the social life-world” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 125). This pursuit of “understanding” is a never-ending process, where rather than attempting to find *the* understanding, a researcher can only discover *an* understanding of reality. For example, Nagel (1974) described the epistemological problem of trying to know the answer to “What is it like to be a bat?” and showed a person’s understanding is always partial or rough even when conceptually adopting the subject’s “point of view” (p. 442).

On considering a suitable research tradition, I first re-examined the ontological and epistemological assumptions that guided my research. These are summarised in **Table 3.2**.

**Table 3.2** Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions for this Research.

(Adapted from Hudson & Ozanne, 1988)

<u>Ontology:</u> Critical Realism	Nature of Reality	There are different layers of reality that can shift over time and which should be viewed from different perspectives.
	Nature of Social Beings	People are continually interacting and shaping their environment; they do not merely react to outside influences.
<u>Epistemology:</u> Constructionism and Modified Objectivism	Knowledge Generated	<i>Shared</i> commonalities of subjective experiences and motivations for a specific time and context.
	View of Causality	The world is complex and anything but static – it is impossible to <i>stagnantly</i> distinguish a bird's eye view of cause and effect.
	Researcher Relationship	The researcher and people under investigation are bound to interact and collaborate on findings at some stage, but the researcher should reflect and be <i>aware</i> of this collaboration as to try and maintain a semblance of <i>theoretical sensitivity</i> within data collection.

The purpose of my research was to uncover commonalities and shared understandings within Collaborative Consumption. These commonalities would then emit an instrumental truth that resides not in 'stagnant' stone, but orbits a "hermeneutical circle" that encourages researchers to "be ready tomorrow to call it falsehood" (Johnson & Onwuebuzie, 2004, p. 18).<sup>57</sup> These arguments of interpretivism – that technologies, cultures, and people are interacting, and that truth found in today's

<sup>57</sup> As a practical example of this 'falsehood of tomorrow' occurring, consider how weights in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) have to be periodically revised to reflect changing expenditure patterns – such as DVD players replacing VCR players, and solid fuel burners replacing eco-friendly heat pumps.

research could be a retired or devolved notion of tomorrow fits the social interplay of my research questions and ontological-epistemological assumptions.

As introduced in Section 1.1, my research topic materialised after Botsman's (2010) TED talk left me curious and optimistic. However, after starting my research, I observed many swapping and (especially) P2P renting websites not reaching their intended usage patterns (with the exception of P2P transport or holiday rentals and media or clothing swapping websites), and the practice was not fully sticking with consumers. By 2015, all of the P2P renting and half of the swapping websites I studied had been shut down and/or were no longer active. The CC revolution had a cloud of hyper-consumptive individualistic doom hanging over it before it had even been publicised. Being a complete outsider of these website communities (living in NZ my online consumption communities were limited), I had questions. What wasn't working? What was it like to engage in these practices? Were they all that were intended? What were they becoming? What could be done to better enable adoption of these types' Collaborative Consumption practices? A better understanding of the early adopter intentions and experiences was essential to start the process of answering these questions.

With these questions, I resonated most strongly with **Pragmatism** (e.g., Dewey, 1988; James, 1975). Used interchangeably with the words "common-sense" and "what works," the underlying aims of pragmatic studies are to solve problems or answer questions (Patton, 1990).

"To a pragmatist, the mandate of science is not to find truth or reality, the existence of which are perpetually in dispute, but to facilitate human problem-solving" (Powell, 2001, p. 884).

Encouraging flexibility with philosophical perspectives, pragmatism often encourages the researcher to keep an open mind on the realist objectivity and relativist subjectivity of *emerging data*. This epistemological and ontological neutrality matches Glaser's (2005) assumptions of classic grounded theory that a researcher should be able to "adopt any epistemological perspective appropriate to the data" and that "it should not be confined to any one lens" (p. 269). Until research has commenced, "the explorer cannot know what he is facing until he faces it, and then looks back over the episode to sort out what happened" (Weick, 1988, p. 305). Hence, although epistemological underpinnings are useful

guides, they should be used as a flexible lens rather than a static window from which to view the world.<sup>58</sup>

Pragmatism complements my chosen theoretical perspectives (i.e., critical realism and constructionism) because it *rejects* the correspondence theory of truth<sup>59</sup> (Johnson and Shifflett, 1981, p. 151) and *embraces* the coherence theory of justification, which values research for the discovery of practical applications, such as helping to better manage, optimise, or organise social processes. Although Bryant (2009) condemned non-committal philosophical positions as an “epistemological fairytale,” I commend this matter-of-fact sensibility that “the research question should be of primary importance – more important than either the method or the theoretical lens [...] that underlies the method” (Hanson et al., 2005, p. 226). Finally, pragmatism also encourages the convergence of inductive and deductive reasoning, which fits into the cyclical nature of grounded theory (Feilzer, 2010) as discussed in Section 3.3.

With my chosen theoretical perspective of pragmatism, I now discuss my chosen methodology of grounded theory and the methods that I followed.

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58 Recall how grounded theory dictates that literature should be used for making one’s way through the darkness (i.e., for illumination and discovery) rather than for support (See Section 2.1.1). My stylistic choices for writing this thesis have been to review my data, find literature that made me better understand my data, write about my data, and then use the literature to develop a framework surrounding this data so that the reader can gain better insight into the topics as they are discussed.

59 The correspondence theory of truth (e.g., Anderson Hudson & Ozanne, 1988) suggests reality exists exclusively outside of the minds and actions of humans and therefore follows a more ontological realist stance.



## 3.2 Methodology: Grounded Theory

The degree of paucity within P2P goods rentals and online swapping indicated that this study was in need of early stage investigation and theory building. As outlined in Section 1.2 and Chapter Two, there has yet to be an established body of literature covering temporary or permanent acquisition and disposition in the context of swapping and renting between peers online. Further, there is a gap in the literature when it comes to explaining the malleability of Provider-Taker user dynamics beyond the literature of Economics (e.g., “two-sided markets” – see Rysman, 2009). This suggests that many of the theories and concepts related to these CC types have yet to be identified past that of speculation. Thus, a qualitative methodology was thought to be an adequate starting point for the purposes of theory generation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and exploration of these phenomena.

On choosing from the many approaches available for qualitative inquiry (e.g., Phenomenology, Case Study, Ethnography, Grounded Theory), I chose grounded theory as the methodology of choice for a number of reasons. These reasons can be explained by answering two sets of questions: (1) Why not choose another method; and (2) Why choose grounded theory?

**Phenomenology** is typically used to *describe* phenomena and the lived experiences of those involved. The aim of this study however was to take a step further; to move away from “relatively superficial observations to more abstract theoretical categories” (Suddaby, 2006, p. 636) by abstracting these subjective experiences into theoretical statements and *understanding* the factors that influence CC experiences. Thus, I was not interested in the subjective experiences of respondents per se but instead on how these experiences and dispositions came to form patterns that could provide a framework for P2P renting and swapping motivations, experiences, and usage.

**Ethnography** is often called upon to provide rich descriptions of cultural knowledge, behaviour, and meanings (e.g., Hammersley, 1992). In the context of this study, ethnography could have been useful in describing the culture of P2P networks. Some scholars even debate over whether ethnographic studies could be capable of generating theory (e.g., Hammersley, 1990), but as Cooney (2010) points out, “Why use ethnography to develop a theory when this is the *raison d’être* of grounded theory?” Although ethnographic research methods have also been successfully combined with grounded theory analysis (Goulding, 2005), ethnography typically looks for full narratives of participants’ experiences, whereas grounded theory searches for the abstract patterns of behaviour in

which participants engage (Glaser, 1998; 2002), where the focus of analysis is not the respondents themselves, but rather the incidents in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

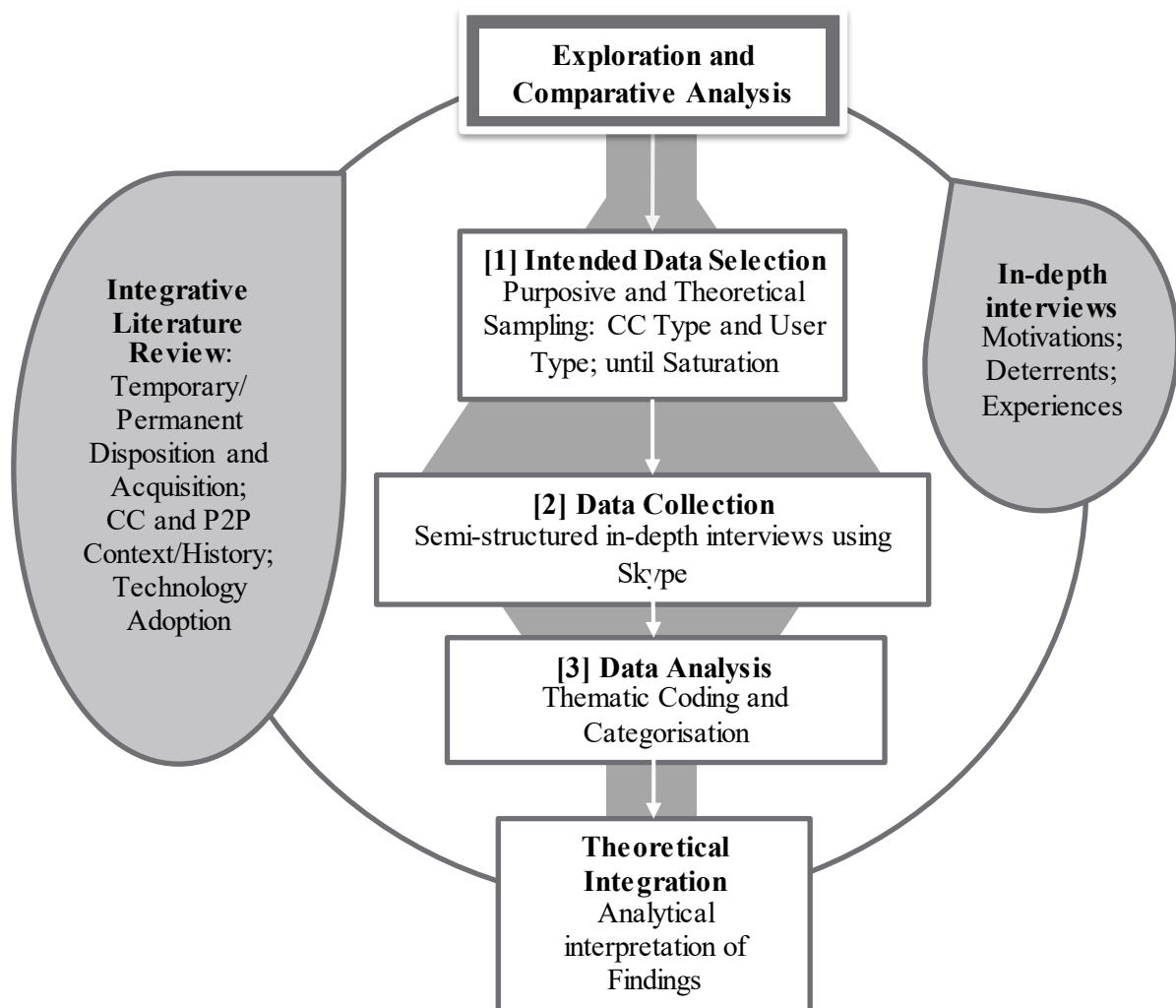
**Comparative Case Study Analysis** (e.g., Eisenhardt, 1989; Perry, 1998) was originally thought to be a valuable method to delve into different types of Collaborative Consumption practices, but after much thought this idea was rejected. Researching each of the CC cases (i.e., product service systems examples, redistribution market examples, and collaborative lifestyle examples) and subsequently comparing them had the possibility to yield meagre implications if the result yielded three identical studies with overlapping findings. Additionally, the amount of active swapping (and P2P renting in particular) websites was minimal throughout the course of this study which would have made it difficult to get enough data saturation from just one website/case. Moreover, my research questions focused on the underlying motivations and experiences of users engaging in temporary and permanent disposition within *any* P2P renting or swapping network (generally), rather than an ethnography of (specific) company examples and a critique of successes and failures within the collaborative economy. Thus, for the scope of this research I set out to explore the differences and similarities being offered between multiple companies with varying characteristics (e.g., product categories, pricing, website design, established brand, social networking features, network externalities, insurance options, services, and partnerships).

**Grounded Theory** is a credible and well-established methodology for the exploration of consumer behaviour and consumer-based theories and constructs (e.g., Goulding, 1998). As this was a study of consumer experiential patterns and motivations for involvement within Collaborative Consumption, this therefore seemed a good fit. Grounded theory has been argued as a useful methodology in exploratory research to “provide a fresh slant on existing knowledge” (Goulding, 2002, p. 42). Although the literature has examined renting and swapping behaviours, this ‘fresh slant’ became apparent through the lens of online facilitated (rather than offline) swapping and peer-to-peer (rather than B2C) networks. Also, supporting my pragmatic secondary research question that sought to discover enabling and deterring factors for CC websites, a grounded “theory does more than provide understanding or paint a vivid picture. It enables users to explain and predict events, thereby providing guides to action” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 25). Thus, I hoped to develop theories “rather than just generating a set of findings” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 22). Grounded theory also matches my chosen ontological and epistemological theoretical perspectives, as it is neither positivist, interpretivist, critical realist, nor constructivist (Urquhart & Fernandez, 2013) – rather it is a neutral “container into which different content can be poured” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 9). Suddaby (2006) and Glaser (1998)

also conceded grounded theory is pragmatically focused, which matches my chosen theoretical perspective.

Thus, as illustrated in **Figure 3.4**, this research employed methods guided by grounded theory. In my discussion of methods, I will first explain the *type* of grounded theory I followed, and then the specific methods used in this research: **Data Sources** (3.3.1), **Data Collection** (3.3.2) and **Data Analysis** (3.3.3). Finally, I will also discuss the **Evaluative Criteria** (3.3.4) used to judge my final reporting of theories.

**Figure 3.4** Overview of Grounded Theory Methods.



### 3.3 Methods of Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is an inductive research method that aims to build theory about a phenomenon by systematically (and cyclically) collecting and analysing data. Preconceived notions and prior theories are left behind as the grounded theory research journey entails theory emergence from the data rather than solely through speculation on prior literature and experience.

Glaser and Strauss' (1967) original version of grounded theory has evolved and divided itself into a number of different versions, becoming a polemical topic of debate (e.g., Dey, 1999). According to the muddled literature, there are many varieties to choose from (including but not limited to: the original 1967 classic version, hybrid, constructivist, feminist, systematic), but the main divide stems from the original authors: (1) Glaser – emergent, classical; (2) Strauss – systematic qualitative data analysis (e.g., Anells, 1997a, 1997b); and their student, (3) Charmaz – constructivist (e.g., Charmaz, 2006).

At first, I considered the advice of past scholars (e.g., Breckenridge, & Jones, 2009; Cutcliffe, 2004) that grounded theory should not be taken as a vague assortment of methods where aspects are picked and chosen from each version to make a soft hybrid methodology. In that vein, I resonated strongly with the underlying principles of the “classic” emergent grounded theory as supported by Glaser (e.g., 1978; 1992; 1998) because it fit my chosen ontology (critical realism).

There are a few reasons the Glaserian approach was originally preferred over Straussian. These mainly concerned differences between data analysis and theory generation. According to Gurd (2008), Glaser's approach is more flexible than the evolved approaches offered by Strauss and Corbin (1998). For example, Strauss and Corbin (1990) stressed that analysis should be conducted word-by-word, whereas Glaser (1978) stressed the importance of abstract conceptualisation with line-by-line analysis. Stern (1994) most eloquently summarised this point when comparing Glaserian grounded theory to that of Straussian: “I think that Strauss, as he examines the data, stops at each word to ask ‘What if?’ Glaser keeps his attention focused on the data and asks, ‘What do we have here?’ Strauss brings to bear every possible contingency that could relate to the data, whether it appears in the data or not. Glaser focuses his attention on the data to allow the data to tell their own story” (p. 220). After reading how Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 82) once took an hour to deliberate over what can be meant by the word “once,” my decision for Glaser's less ‘paralysed analysis’ was reaffirmed.

Glaser's approach was also initially preferred over Charmaz's constructivist<sup>60</sup> version because of an ontological incompatibility (Charmaz followed relativism, whereas I followed critical realism). Further, Charmaz (2003) criticised classical grounded theory for focusing more on "analysis rather than the portrayal of subjects experience in its fullness" (p. 269). In contrast, my research questions guided me to be interested in the patterns and incidents of respondents rather than gather narratives of respondents. Following a more classical approach, I aimed to gain a conceptual understanding of online swapping and P2P renting behaviours rather than focus on interpretive understandings of individual respondents.

However, as this research maintained a pragmatic worldview and grounded theory is cloaked in its ability to maintain flexibility<sup>61</sup>, my methods *did* eventually veer away from a classical direction and were modified as the emerging data required it and as my theoretical sensitivity transformed. Fisher (1997) supports this decision when discussing the Glaser-Strauss divide and adherence to one set of methods over another, "it would be unreasonable to assume that only its originators may develop and modify grounded theory" (p. 10). Indeed, many scholars believe a methodology cannot be expected to remain under control of its creator(s) once released to the wilds of academia (e.g., Morse, 2006; Stern, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 283).

I agree with Lee and Sarker (2008) that methodologies and theoretical perspectives should not be regarded as sacrosanct "bodies of rules, regulations, and other directives whose purpose is to receive our unquestioning obedience and complete submission, but instead as a source of other's scholar's wisdom and insights inspiring us to innovative ways of looking at and combining different research methods" (p. 3). Thus, in retrospect, my methodology went against the advice of past scholars who argued that one must subscribe to one type of grounded theory version (e.g., Breckenridge, & Jones, 2009; Cutcliffe, 2004) because it ended up following an assortment of methods and assumptions from various grounded theory versions.

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<sup>60</sup> Further, although I followed a constructionist epistemology, I was aware that constructionism and constructivism are not the same, as first noted in Section 3.1. Constructionism goes a step above constructivism because it shows that humans are not only interpreting different realities, but also affecting different realities with their actions and social negotiations. Thus, constructionism adds the assumption that agents of socialisation (e.g., social structures) have an effect on the creation of shared norms and meanings as well as the outcome of realities. In other words, constructivism diverges from critical realism because it holds the belief that social structures do not have causal powers (Peters, Pressey, Vanharanta, & Johnston, 2012). Constructivism ignores this mutual level of interpretation, negotiation, and reaction which causes ontological-epistemological disconcertion (e.g., Leppington, 1991), and it therefore does not address the distinction between different layers of reality.

<sup>61</sup> Indeed, prior to the Glaser-Strauss divide, the original authors "invited their readers to use grounded theory strategies flexibly in their own way" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 9).

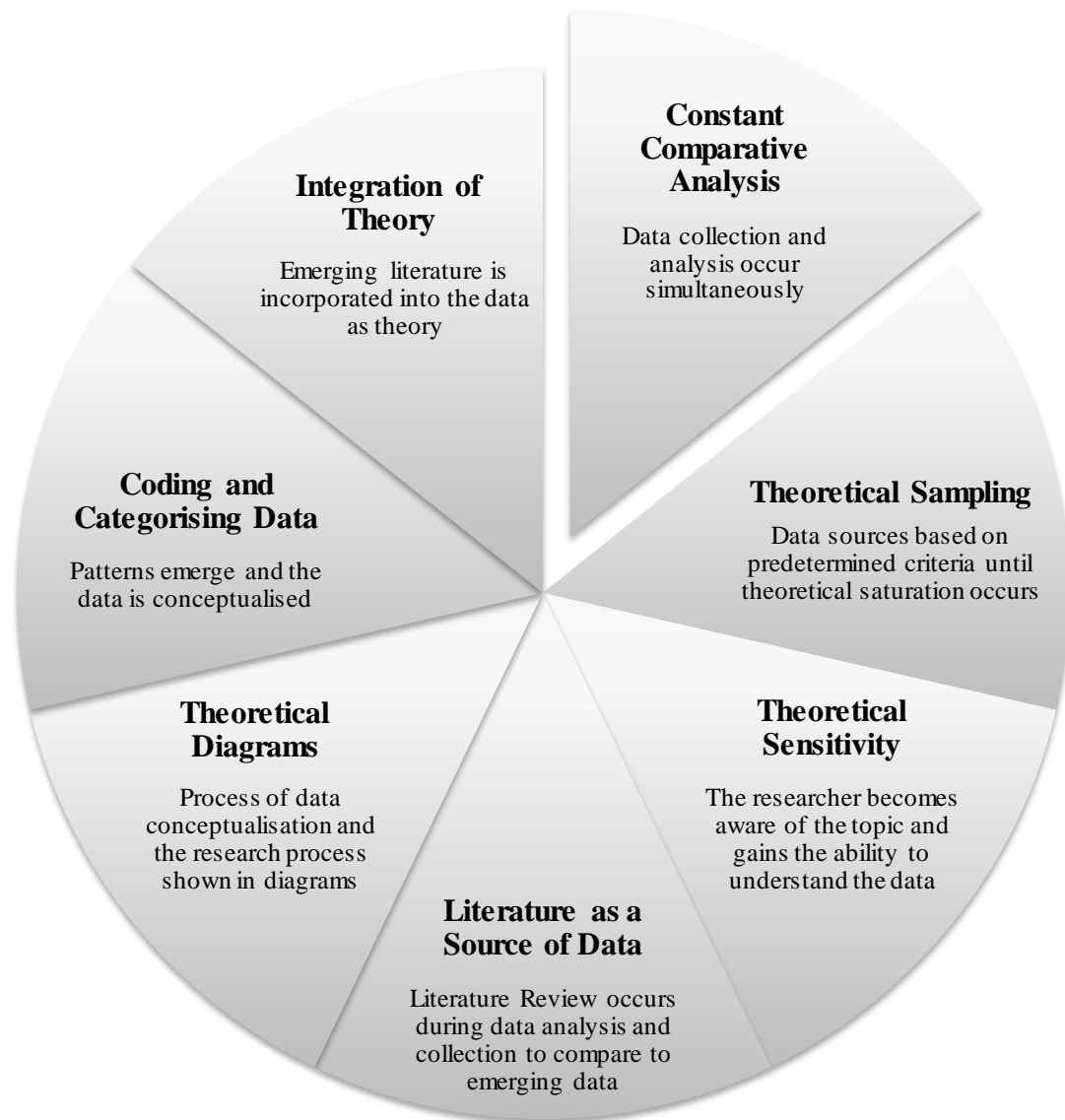
However, following Babchuck's (1996) counsel that these modifications should be made transparent, I endeavoured to specify instances of "*whose* guidelines were used" or "*which steps* were followed in the research process" (Hallberg, 2006, p. 143). My methods were therefore only "softly" guided by the grounded theory methodology and should not be judged as a "hard" classical or constructivist or systematic version. Instead, it should be judged by the methods I *did* follow which are made explicit in the subsequent sections.

For example, I noticed that many of my methods are epistemologically compatible with Charmaz's constructivist version of grounded theory. In particular, I agreed with her recommendation to adopt a writing style that is more literary and inclusive of the researcher's voice (Charmaz, 2000; 2001). By actively writing in the first person, I maintain researcher reflexivity by allowing the reader to see "fragments of field work time, context and mood together in a colloquy of [my] several selves – reflecting, witnessing, wondering, accepting – all at once" (Charmaz & Mitchell, 1996, p. 299). This goes against the classic version which, according to Charmaz (2006, p. 132), sees researchers as "authoritative experts, who bring in an objective view to the research."

Despite the many divergences and contentions of grounded theory, many fundamental techniques put forth in the original 1967 book have endured as agreed upon characteristics. McCann and Clark (2003a) presented seven essentials of grounded theory (see **Figure 3.5**), which I used to guide my methods.<sup>62</sup>

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62 Note: I followed these techniques with the exception of "theoretical memos," which I did not formally incorporate into my data collection or analysis as separate documents or data sources (but rather directly wrote memos into my draft and changed them to reflect and support new data). However, I did create numerous "theoretical diagrams" explaining the main themes from my analysis.

**Figure 3.5** Essential Methods of Grounded Theory introduced by McCann and Clark (2003a).

These key ingredients of the grounded theory methodology are discussed in more detail in the next three sections, which expand upon the proposed *methods* of data sourcing (sampling), collection (including specific aims of the research), analysis (coding, reflection and integration), and appraisal (quality evaluation of theories).

### 3.3.1 Grounded Theory Methods: Data Sources

Following Glaser and Strauss' (1967, p. 52) advice, I first set out to "be clear on the basic types of groups" that I wished to compare. As I was interested in motivations and experiences of P2P renting and swapping users, the respondents of interest would be anyone that had signed up to a P2P renting or swapping website (a broad and all-inclusive undertaking for "users"). As explained in Section 1.2.3, user type was of particular interest in this study to garner how Providers and Takers may compare when it came to CC motivations. This buyer-seller malleability (Siddiqui & Turley, 2006) was explored via three identified user types: two-way users (Takers and Providers), one-way users (Takers or Providers), and non-users (those who had not yet participated in a transaction but were members of a P2P rental or swapping website). For swapping, this malleability is more tangled (a barter exchange entails simultaneous disposition and acquisition). However, I predicted swapping respondents could have different intentions and inclinations where some users may have been more motivated to *dispose* of things while others may have preferred swapping as a way to *acquire* things. This could also be exhibited in a continuum of actions – Providers who were only interested in disposition might not browse for items to initiate a swap – they may instead wait until a Taker finds their items and makes an inquiry to swap.

**Purposive sampling** (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was used to get an overview of these different user types that may exist in P2P renting and swapping websites. The original set criteria I identified for purposive sampling is outlined in **Table 3.3**.

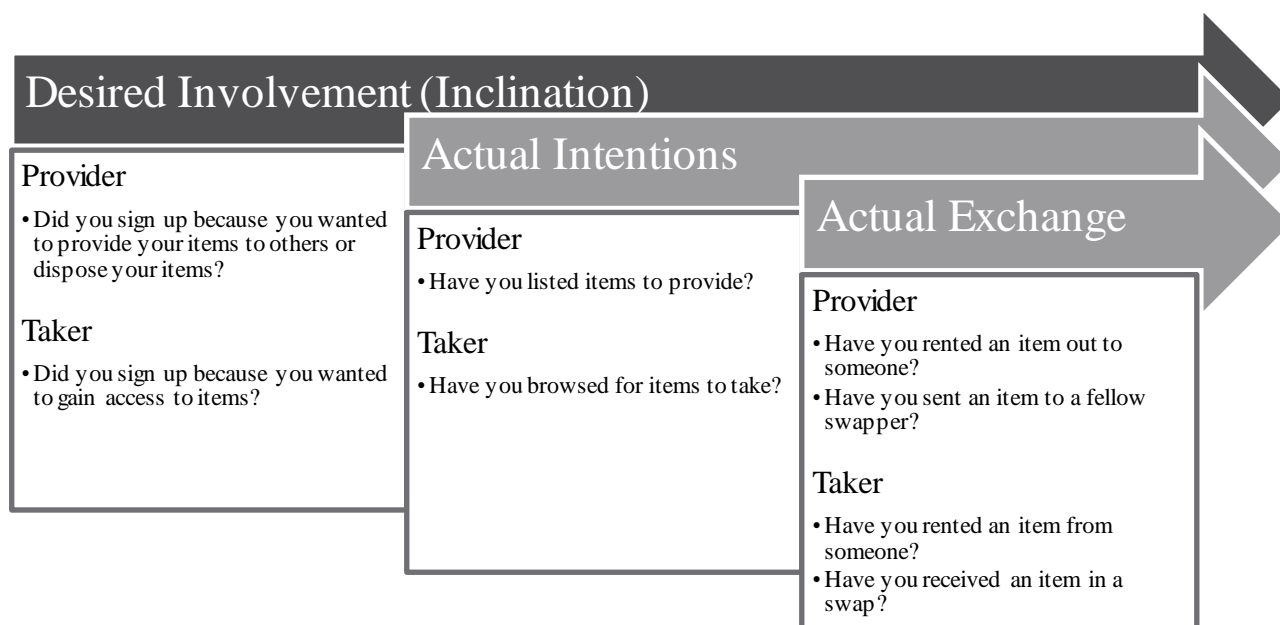
**Table 3.3** Purposive Sampling - User Types.

Online Swapping			
		<i>Had browsed for items to swap</i>	<i>Had not browsed for items to swap</i>
	<i>Had listed items to swap out</i>	"Two-way user"	"Swapping Purger"
	<i>Had not listed items to swap out</i>	"Swapping Seeker"	"Non-user"
P2P Renting			
		<i>Had Rented from others</i>	<i>Had not rented from anyone</i>
	<i>Had rented out to others</i>	"Two-way user"	"Rental Provider"
	<i>Had not rented out to anyone</i>	"Rental Taker"	"Non-user"



In hindsight to my data collection and analysis, I realised these criteria were not equally comparable for swapping and renting users because it only included **intention actions** (involvement that may reveal insight to a user's inclination) for swapping user types and **exchange actions** (involvement that reveals a user's actual participation) for renting user types. A more accurate comparison includes a categorisation of each layer of disposition/acquisition involvement as shown in **Figure 3.6**.

**Figure 3.6** Different User Types for Three Layers of Involvement.



Although these themes of involvement are discussed in my interviews and findings, I regretfully did not do a formal categorisation or survey of each participant's full layers of involvement. Thus, the resulting categorisation for my final samples solely distinguishes between users at the level of actual exchange (where a swapping participant can either be a two-way user or non-user, and a renting participant can be a two-way user, one-way user, or non-user); and the layer of desired involvement (why they signed up to the website).

**On choosing a sample size,** it was estimated that a minimum rule of thumb to reach data saturation was twelve respondents per CC Type (i.e., swapping and renting); as one study on choosing sample size shows that "after analysis of twelve interviews, new themes emerged infrequently" (Guest et al., 2006, p. 74). However, the main indication that enough participants had participated came from theoretical redundancy (e.g., Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Thus, analysis and collection continued until *data* was saturated. This occurred when new data became static and repetitive (Locke, 2001) and when further analysis yielded nothing new (Strauss, 1987). I therefore followed the counsel of Clarke (2003,

p. 571) who advised to stop data collection when “you don’t think you have missed much of anything. You think these are the most important elements. (Of course there are many others, but they don’t seem to ‘make a difference’ to the stories you would tell).” Indeed, “the validity, meaningfulness and insights generated from qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information-richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size” (Patton, 1990, p. 185).

Due to the cyclical nature of constant comparison analysis, theoretical sampling also required samples to be flexible enough to evolve throughout the study; thus the intended data sources were not set in stone, as it was impossible to foresee ahead of time the exact data set that would be end up being used. Purposive sampling was therefore adaptive as my understanding of user types became more grounded. For example, I eventually eliminated my focus for interviewing non-users of swapping websites because the findings became quickly saturated when compared to P2P renting non-users. More importantly, by the end of data collection, swapping non-usership pragmatically became less of a focal point for this study as it was not as prevalent or problematic to respondents as it was for P2P renting (swapping websites were being heavily used in comparison).

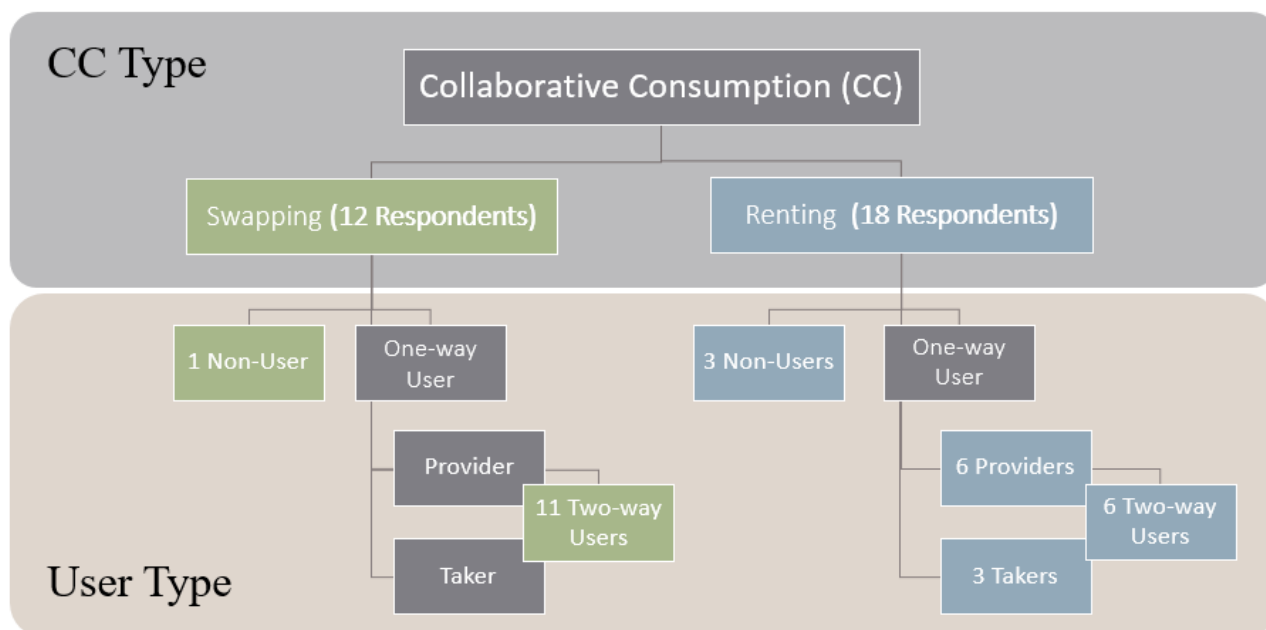
**To recruit respondents,** requests were sent via LinkedIn, Facebook, Email and Website Contact Forms to the founders of websites listed in Appendix C to seek assistance with spreading the message to their users. However, the majority of these requests went unanswered. Therefore, most swapping and rental users were directly recruited from the websites. These users were visible by browsing available rental/swapping items, the ‘find users’ pages, the website’s messaging boards and forums, and user reviews of previous transactions. To increase response rate, participants were also offered a US \$25 gift card (of their choice and converted to their currency).

The final sample (**Figure 3.7**) of willing participants were recruited from a total of eight different P2P renting websites and six swapping websites<sup>63</sup> between August 2011 and March 2014.<sup>64</sup>

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63 Nearly all participants were members of more than one swapping/renting and all respondents said they were members of another type of CC website. Details of the renting and swapping websites have been kept confidential as requested by respondents.

64 By early 2015, all eight of the rental websites had shut down, while three of the six swapping websites that respondents were interviewed from had shut down and/or were no longer active (e.g., had broken website links, no activity within the past year). I also maintained informal communication and correspondence with some of the respondents up until June 2015 to see if/how things were changing because of the websites that had shut down.

**Figure 3.7** Snapshot of CC and User Types (Actual Exchange) Represented in Final Sample.

Due to the “grassroots” growing nature of these websites, many respondents turned out to be connected to the websites’ business (e.g., interns, founders, CEO, web developers), but also participated as users. These key informants provided an in-depth understanding of an otherwise underexplored practice, as the literature suggests they are more knowledgeable about target market behaviour (Kumar, Stern, & Anderson, 1993). The inclusion of founders and interns veers away from the bias errors that may occur when only interviewing founders, who are likely to interpret events differently than a lower-level employee, a common complaint of key informant research (Hambrick, 1981).

Additionally, it was found in the interviews that many founders could be classified as “user entrepreneurs” because they had developed their P2P website to address a personal need and want for the service.<sup>65</sup> This distinction from regular entrepreneurs or producers puts them at a higher level of involvement for use because they were gaining benefit from the website’s utility rather than solely focussing on financial or commercial benefits (Haefliger, Jager, & von Krogh, 2010). The resulting mix of informants and key informants thus provided not only “personal feelings, opinions, and behaviours,” but also “patterns of behaviour’ generalised from ‘either observed (actual) or expected (prescribed) organisational relations” of renting and swapping users (Seidler, 1974, p. 817).

<sup>65</sup> This trend was further supported upon reviewing past interviews with CC founders (available on the “Collaborative Consumption hub,” [collaborativeconsumption.com](http://collaborativeconsumption.com)).

Eighteen interview respondents for renting websites were evenly split with nine females and nine males, and included thirteen ordinary informants (regular to irregular users and non-users) and six key informants (three founders and three part-time interns). **Table 3.4** shows the pseudonym, location, and user-type for P2P renting respondents.

**Table 3.4** Interview Respondents from Eight P2P Renting Websites.

Pseudonym	User-type (Two Layers)		Location
	<i>Actual Exchange</i>	<i>Desired Involvement/Inclination</i>	
01 Emma	Non-user	Signed up to be a two-way rental user	NY, USA
02 Joel	Non-user	Signed up to be a rental Provider	CA, USA; LDN, UK
03 Tim	Non-user	Signed up to be a two-way rental user	CA, USA
04 Anita	Provider	Signed up to be a rental Taker	SYD, AU
05 Ariel	Provider	Signed up to be a rental Taker	SYD, AU
06 Barbara	Provider	Signed up to be a rental Taker	NY, USA
07 Bob	Provider	Signed up to be a rental Taker	NY, USA
08 Jack	Provider*	Signed up to be a rental Taker	NY, USA
09 Martin	Provider	Signed up to be a rental Provider	CA, USA
10 Samuel	Taker	Signed up to be a rental Provider	TX, USA
11 Bailey	Taker	Signed up to be a rental Provider	SYD, AU
12 William	Taker	Signed up to be a rental Taker	SYD, AU
13 Earl	Two-way user*	Signed up to be a two-way rental user	CA, USA
14 Leigh	Two-way user*	Signed up to be a two-way rental user	CA, USA
15 Wade <sub>(x2)</sub>	Two-way user**	Wanted experience as a two-way rental user	TX, USA
16 Charlotte <sub>(x2)</sub>	Two-way user	Signed up to be a two-way rental user	SYD, AU
17 Lynne <sub>(x2)</sub>	Two-way user**	Created website to become two-way rental user	SYD, AU
18 Tara	Two-way user**	Created website to become two-way rental user	LDN, UK

\* Part-time Intern of website

\*\* Website Founder/CEO (Wade was a CEO of a website that had already been created; Lynne and Tara created their websites as user entrepreneurs)

<sub>(x2)</sub> Source Triangulation (Informal follow-up discussions over Skype, Facebook, and LinkedIn transpired 1-2 years after initial interview to see if/how things had changed, to discuss my findings and see if they had anything further to add or dispute)

<sup>17</sup> Lynne was initially interviewed as a non-user before her website had launched, and 1 year later she was interviewed again after she had become a two-way user on her own website.

A sample of twelve swapping users had eleven females and one male, and included eleven ordinary informants (regular to irregular users and non-users) and one key informant (a website moderator). **Table 3.5** shows the pseudonym, location, user-type, and Provider/Taker inclination for interview respondents of swapping websites.

**Table 3.5** Interview Respondents from Six Online Swapping Websites.

Pseudonym	User-type (Two Layers)		Location
	<i>Actual Exchange</i>	<i>Desired Involvement/Inclination</i>	
01 Richard	Non-user	Signed up to get rid of stuff, was not interested in browsing or getting things; listed 27 times but had no potential Takers.	NZ
02 Amanda	Two-way user	Was searching for ways to save money. Had a lot of clutter and signed up to get rid of her stuff. Did not have anything in mind she needed to acquire.	USA
03 Clarissa	Two-way user	Initially signed up to get rid of stuff rather than get new things.	USA
04 Jillian	Two-way user	Was initially excited to purge but also started browsing immediately. On eBay she buys and sells.	USA; UK
05 Natalia	Two-way user	Identified herself as more of a purger but was also interested in getting new things. With eBay she only buys.	USA
06 Joanna	Two-way user	Started posting and browsing at the same time and asked people for swaps right away. With eBay she sells more than buys.	USA
07 Alicia	Two-way user	Signed up to give things away but eventually looked for things to get as well. On TradeMe she only buys.	NZ
08 Sarah	Two-way user	Signed up as a two-way user but started by browsing to educate herself with the process of swapping online.	USA
09 Rose	Two-way user	Originally signed up to get rid of stuff however she started browsing for items immediately. With eBay she only sells items rather than buying.	USA
10 Corrine	Two-way user	Excited to get new things while using the stuff she already had as currency. With eBay she only buys.	USA
11 Lauren	Two-way user	First signed up to pass on books but also get some new books in return.	NZ
12 Kelly <sub>(x2)</sub>	Two-way user*	Volunteer website administrator, originally signed up to get rid of things but was excited to get stuff too.	USA

\* Moderator of Website

<sub>(x2)</sub> Source Triangulation (Informal follow-up discussion on Facebook transpired 1 year after interview to see if/how things had changed, to discuss my findings and see if they had anything further to add or dispute)

Dredge and Gyimothy (2015) criticised existing CC discourse for having “an uneven emphasis on the buyer-seller dyad to explain market mechanisms.” For example, other sources of data that could be considered relevant to the nature of CC exchange are governments,<sup>66</sup> civil society,<sup>67</sup> and intermediaries.<sup>68</sup> Indeed, **theoretical sampling** and data saturation stipulate that rather than relying only on one participant or incident as evidence of a theme, numerous incidents are needed to saturate emerging categories. This is to avoid committing “a version of the ecological fallacy” such that “a particularistic (one person) source of a concept is generalised to a pattern applicable to many people” which would lead to “grounded conjecture, not a grounded theory” (Glaser, 2007, paragraph 8). Thus, the resulting themes from grounded theory are meant to conceptualise patterns that are psychological and social rather than individual.

From this guidance I made sure to constantly be checking other sources of data (e.g., through more interviews, extant literature, primary observation of websites, news articles, and blogs on Collaborative Consumption). Through this constant comparison, I ensured that categories and concepts derived from individual participant incidents (e.g., personal experiences) were saturated and explanatory from other sources of data as well. However, this is not to say that incidents which were not repeated or saturated were deemed useless. According to critical realism, it is not only possible but expected that irregularity will occur. The purpose of this research was therefore focused on explaining the processes (e.g., motivating, enabling, and constraining influences) of incidents.

In addition to interviewing different types of users, I also observed the websites in order to better understand the phenomena my participants were describing. Ninety-four swapping and renting businesses were informally tracked from 2011 to 2015 (twenty-five and sixty-nine respectively). From an examination of these websites, I was able to categorise businesses based on a number of factors including: renting or swapping, general or specific product offering category, type of governance, presence of a participant forum, costs to users, among others. Some of these factors were also rated on a 5-item scale (Minimal, Poor, Sufficient, Good, and Excellent) based on whether the information was

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66 Some respondents acknowledged that taxes or laws were relevant for their involvement with other CC activities like renting out an apartment, a boat that could harm someone or providing risky services. However, when I attempted to weave these concerns or other concerns back to the context of online swapping and P2P renting, they became less relevant, so this was not a data source I was encouraged to further explore. In addition, I also considered that users were recruited from different countries with differing cultures/governments so comparisons may not be relevant.

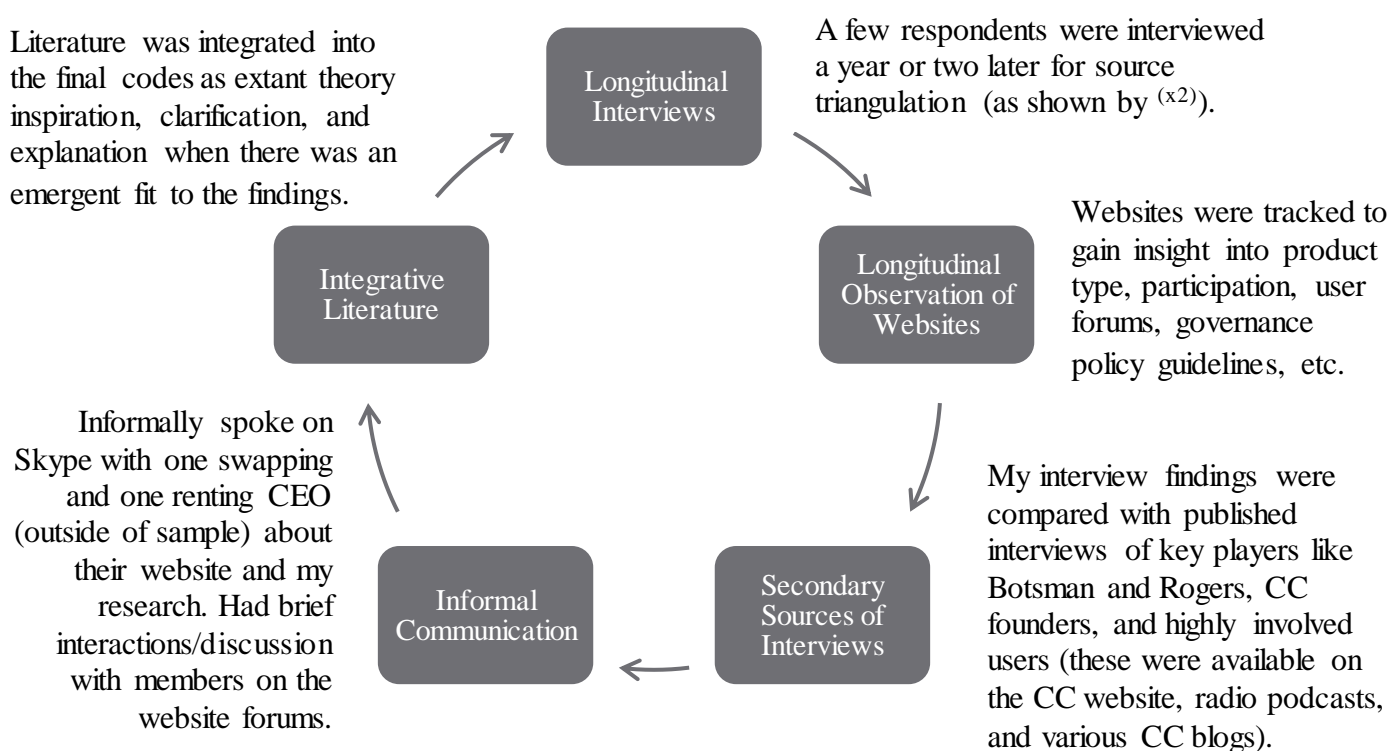
67 Many interviews showed evidence that society influences were affecting their decisions and abilities when it came to their consumption. These types of influences have been explored from extant literature on norms as discussed by participants.

68 For example, the founders and interns who acted as user entrepreneurs were also able to give me insight into the background of the intermediary company and the website structure.

updated, used by participants, easy to understand, and/or had multiple features available.<sup>69</sup> As I conducted this process in 2011 and 2015, I was able to determine which businesses were still in operation, which had closed down or had no activity, and which had rebranded or changed the nature of their operations (e.g., shifting focus from P2P to B2C); which allowed me to better see the changes that P2P renting and swapping websites had gone through during the time of my interviews. Through these observations,<sup>70</sup> I have gained more clarity and knowledge of the nature of the websites which, in accordance with user narratives, I have allowed to guide my faithfulness for writing descriptions of websites policies and processes within the findings.

This concludes my methods of constant comparison for data sources and recruitment, as summarised in **Figure 3.8**. An overview of ethical considerations and documents for respondents can be found in Appendices A and B. Next, I discuss my methods of data collection.

**Figure 3.8** Summary of Theoretical Sampling Sources.



<sup>69</sup> However, a lot of this information was unavailable as an observant outsider. Some websites required extensive Self Curation and proof of address or phone number to enter the website as a full user, so I did not have full access (especially when it was in another country). Further, as many websites had shut down, I did not have a full picture because I often came to the website “too late” (past its peak of performance/usership involvement).

<sup>70</sup> See Appendix C for a summary of these findings and more information on my method of collection and final sources.

### 3.3.2 Grounded Theory Methods: Data Collection

“We cannot observe the meanings people attach to what goes on in the world – we have to ask people about these things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective”

(Patton, 1990, p. 196).

Data collection occurred from 2011 to early 2014. I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with people from each projected CC-user group (**Table 3.3**). As participants were primarily based in North America, Australia and the UK, discussions were done online using Skype to be able to reach participants and to minimise costs associated with geographic distance (e.g., Pincott & Branthwaite, 2000). Skype is not a perfect medium for interviews however, as respondents can become easily distracted (i.e., since they are sitting in front of a computer they might start browsing and checking emails if they get bored) and issues of Internet connection or technical difficulties may arise (Kazmer & Xie, 2008).

Although Hanna (2012) suggested webcams could allow “face-to-face” interaction, I decided not to require this stipulation because many users could be deterred from interviewing if they were uncomfortable with being seen on video, or even inhibited from participating if they did not have a camera (which could skew the participants’ to those with higher technology adoption inclinations). A few participants initially stated an unwillingness to do the interview because they thought they would have to be seen on camera (by assuring them otherwise, they were not excluded); furthermore, a few users had no access to Skype and/or were unwilling to download it. In the latter situation, I used Skype as an inexpensive way to call their landline for a phone interview. Thus, interviews generally followed a “telephone” approach put forth by Holt (2010) unless, in some cases, the interview respondents autonomously chose to use their webcam. Interviews ranged from 30 – 150 minutes depending on the participants’ involvement and interest in the subject.

Interview questions were developed to explore the primary research questions first put forth in Section 1.2.4 (as adapted from Goulding, 2002, p. 105):



**Question 1:** What is the nature of the experience derived from online swapping and P2P renting; and how do these experiences differ between (a) user-types (Providers, Takers, and Non-Users) and (b) CC types (online swapping, P2P renting)?

**Question 2:** What are the motivating and deterring factors behind online swapping and P2P renting; and how do these motivations and deterrents differ between user-types and CC types?

These research questions were formulated to meet the typical requirements for grounded theory; namely being open-ended, organic, and devoid of assumptions or prior theory (e.g., Willig, 2001). From this standpoint my research questions (in hindsight) tried to explore the three main layers of reality outlined in Section 3.1.2: (1) Desired Reality – motivations (i.e., why<sup>71</sup> would consumers choose to provide their items in the second-hand world and why would other consumers choose to take these items?) and intentions; (2) Actual Reality – processes and experiences; and (3) Perceived Reality – assumptions, perceived enablements and constraints.<sup>72</sup> Additionally, following my theoretical perspective of pragmatism, it was also important to explore a secondary research question:

**Question 3:** What are some enabling factors that might make these systems more appealing?

This question met the pragmatic viewpoint that research should attempt to benefit users and nonusers (i.e., stakeholders) that are involved in the phenomena of interest. More specifically, “the function of intelligence” derived from this study was “not that of copying objects of the environment, but rather of taking account of the way in which more effective and more profitable relations with these objects may be established in the future” (Dewey, 1998, p. 10).

Using these open-ended questions, I designed a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix B.3). However, as the purpose was to try to get a person’s perception of reality (a construction unique to them), participant-driven ideas that emerged from the nature of these open-ended questions and flexible conversations were also explored. The interview design and research questions were therefore

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<sup>71</sup> Also *what* items would consumers choose for various types of disposal, *how* would consumers choose to dispose of their items, to *whom* would they dispose their items, *where* would they choose to dispose these items, and *when* and for how long would they prefer disposition to take place?

<sup>72</sup> Thus, in hindsight I realise Question 2 is actually subset of Question 1 because the nature of the experience can be modelled around these three layers of reality, and motivations are part of Desired Reality, while deterrents exist within Actual and Perceived Realities.

living documents, allowing interview topics to veer off course when needed and the research focus to be continually revised throughout data collection and analysis. In other words, they were just a *guide*.

With constant comparative analysis, I would often be explicit and direct with the respondents. For instance, if they discussed a belief which contradicted their description of an activity they professed to engage with, I would point it out directly and ask them why they were contradicting themselves. By doing this I was able to push the respondent to further reflect on their underlying motivations. Additionally, at the end of each interview I discussed findings from other respondents and asked them to give their thoughts. One may argue that by doing this I was influencing their answers or pushing the findings on the respondent – however from my experience with the interviews I was able to achieve the opposite – by discussing previous findings with respondents I was able to get those instances of heavy disagreement (i.e., “Ohh, I definitely don’t agree with that!”), which would then lead into more discussion of what they *did* find important. These instances were crucial when it came to “correcting” my interpretations and making sure that data saturation had been met.

Further, comparative analysis (discussed in Section 3.3.1) reduced my bias on the data because as Cutcliffe (2000) explained, “if the hunch belongs solely to the researcher, and is not a part of the world being investigated, this will have no meaning for the interviewees and can be discarded in due course.” (p. 1480). This also allowed for further probing – just because a respondent did not bring something up in an interview does not mean it was unimportant to them. On the contrary they may just have difficulties reflecting under pressure. For this reason, the questions and probes were important starting points to allow the respondent to give their opinions and experiences on a number of different topics.

This concludes my methods used for data collection. An overview of ethical considerations, documents for respondents, and my interview guide can be found in Appendices A and B. Next, I present my methods of data analysis.

### 3.3.3 Grounded Theory Methods

#### Data Analysis

The grounded theory approach requires the researcher to constantly compare data and emerging theory throughout data collection and analysis. Thus, analysis was an organic process, where themes were continually redefined, shifted, and reconnected.

The grounded theory literature covering data analysis and coding comprises a battlefield of opposing methods. Many authors classically go with Glaser's (1978) theoretical coding and substantive coding, with the latter including open and selective coding; some follow Strauss (1987) with "open," "axial" and "selective" coding; some separate categories into "descriptive" and "analytic" levels of abstraction (e.g., Willig, 2001), while others call the three levels of coding "concepts," "categories," and "relationships" (e.g., Schreiber, 2001). Still others claim coding should be done by "naming," "comparing," and "memoing" (e.g., Locke, 2001).

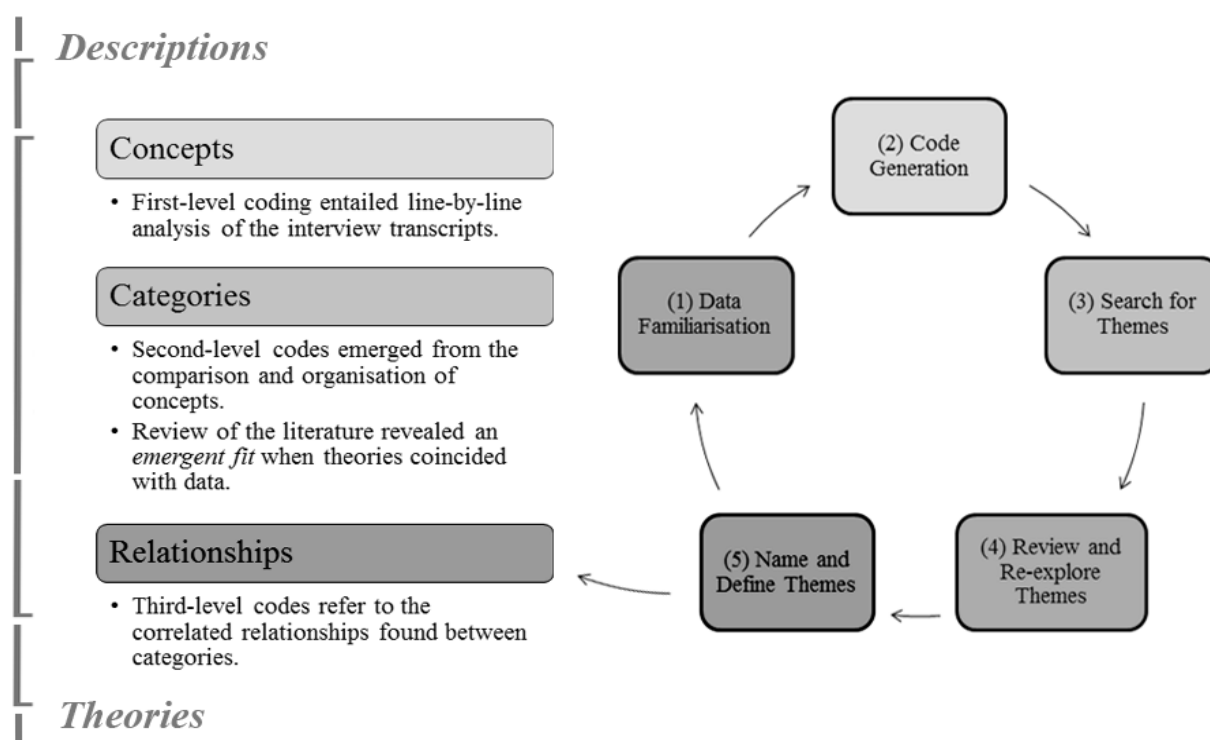
My decisions on coding and themes were constantly revisited during analysis and data collection – however I found the language of "concepts," "categories," and "relationships" outlined by Schreiber (2001) to be the most straightforward – whereby my analysis went through three main levels of coding that moved from mere *descriptions* to grounded *theories*: (1) Concepts – first-level codes described words and ideas found with line-by-line analysis; (2) Categories – second-level codes emerged from the comparison and organisation of concepts; and (3) Relationships – third-level codes were found by exploring correlations and relationships between categories and comparing emergent theories with extant literature.

To maintain a semblance of organisation, I also followed the stages of thematic analysis (e.g., Ellis & Kitzinger, 2002; Kitzinger & Willmott, 2002; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004) put forth by Braun and Clarke (2006) to find common themes that emerged from the data. Although thematic analysis is argued by some to be a methodology in its own right (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006), I used it as a tool within grounded theory (e.g., Boyatzis, 1998; Ryan & Bernard, 2000), where "analysis [is] based on participants' conceptions of actual communication episodes" (Keyton, 2010, p. 430).

There are six general steps to follow when conducting thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) Familiarise yourself with the data; (2) Generate codes; (3) Search for themes; (4) Review and re-explore the themes; (5) Name and define the themes; and (6) Produce the final report.

These steps were used as a guideline for moulding together the coding instructions provided by grounded theory scholars. Overall, this type of analysis was chosen as it allowed for exploration in an understudied topic and provided the flexibility required for grounded theory. The steps were organic and because of constant comparison analysis they were not always done in a sequential order. Thus, these should be looked at as more of a checklist to follow rather than sequential steps. The three levels of coding and stages of thematic analysis are summarised in **Figure 3.9**.

**Figure 3.9** Levels of Coding and Stages of Thematic Analysis.



**Data Familiarisation.** The first step to thematic analysis began with data collection (i.e., interviews). Audio recordings were transcribed to include a word-for-word dictation (final transcriptions for swapping and renting interviews were respectively 101,651 words, 246 pages and 155,285 words, 333 pages). Transcribing the data acted as a preliminary familiarisation (Riessman, 1993) before reading the data with literature. Also, as transcribing the interview verbatim required close attention to the data, interpretation and close reading of themes usually occurred simultaneously (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). Throughout transcription, I noted down ideas for coding and theme creation as well as for subsequent interview questions.

**Code Generation.** Then, initial codes (concepts) were generated. First-level codes are “the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 63). Keeping with the spirit of grounded theory, the first round of coding was purely data-driven,<sup>73</sup> where the analysis involved following the transcripts line by line to create descriptive codes and labels that corresponded to the words and ideas being used. This process was *exhaustive* because everything uttered by participants was given a corresponding concept label regardless of whether or not I thought it to be applicable to the research questions. However, I grouped concepts by “ideas” rather than “words,” so first-level codes were recorded as quotes of varying lengths.

**Search for Themes.** The third step to thematic analysis entailed searching for common themes (categories) within the concepts. This step is also known as the second-level of coding in grounded theory, where analysis entails grouping together first-level codes by looking for similarities and differences. Sometimes known as *axial* coding because codes are placed on an *axis* (i.e., the central structure to which first-level codes are joined), this stage is where abstract references and categories are created to organise the emerging concepts. Although these steps are written linearly, theme discovery occurred simultaneously with second-level coding, integrative literature review, and additional interviews. Generally, a first-level code would start off as a simple concept subheading, and as more data was introduced, I added an overarching category heading. These higher-level themes organised the emerging concepts. If later on the category heading was found to be an inadequate descriptor, it was modified.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), “a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set” (p. 82). Interview transcripts and the first-level coding documents were therefore read and re-read (Rice & Ezzy, 1999) to determine common themes. Owen (1984) discusses three criteria for this type of thematic analysis: (1) Recurrence (i.e., the same meaning is found more than once even if the respondents used different words); (2) Repetition (i.e., similar words or phrases are repeated); and (3) Forcefulness (i.e., respondents place emphasis by focusing on certain interview topics). Therefore, themes were built around reoccurring concepts portrayed by the participants (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

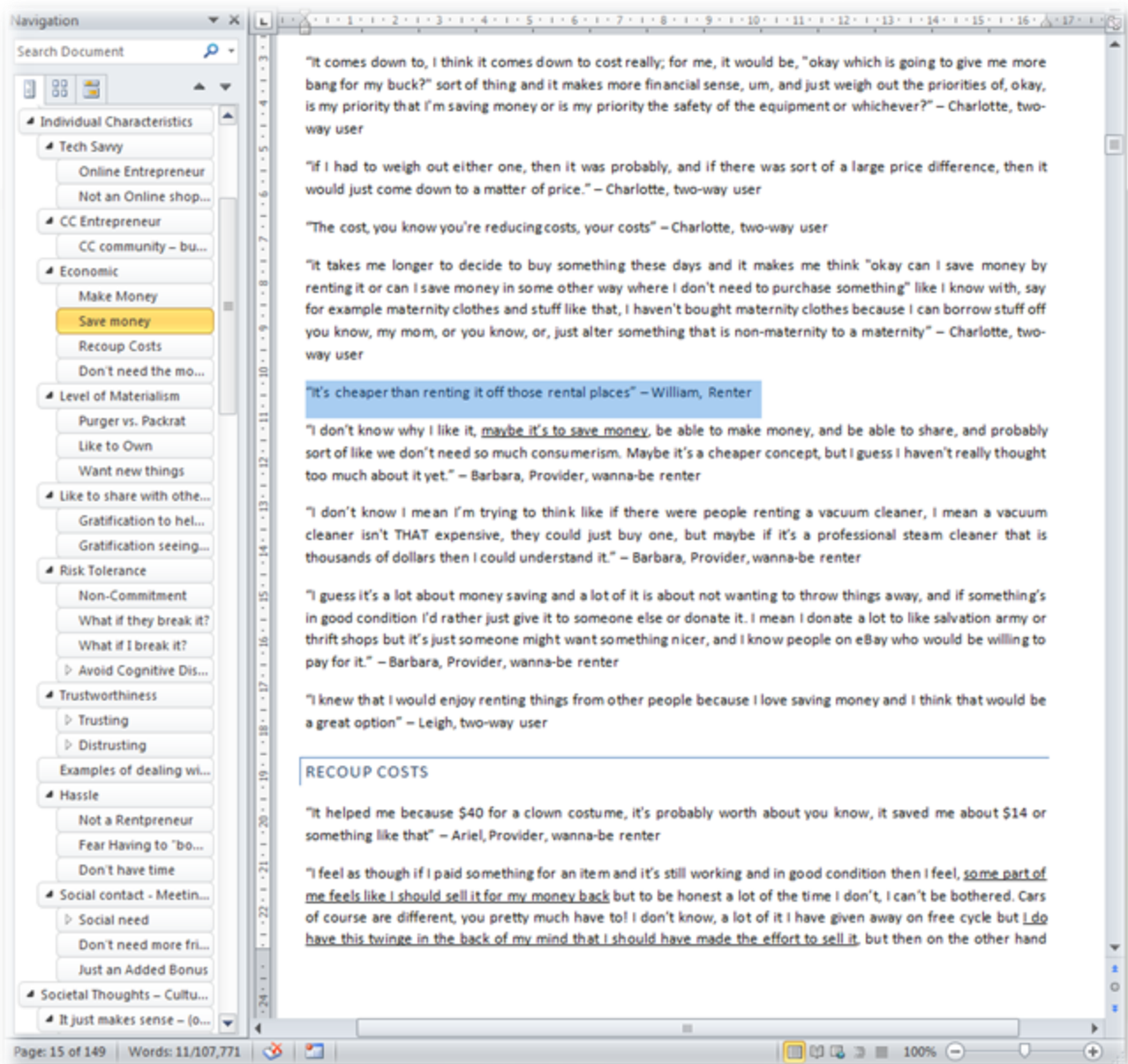
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<sup>73</sup> Data-driven coding is also known as *open* coding because “the researcher tries to name the concepts with an open mind” (Ghorbani, Moridsadat, & Jafarzadeh, 2015, p. 41).

At first, NVivo coding software was considered as a useful tool to record and retrieve recurring ideas for first and second-level coding (e.g., Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Pergert, 2014). However, after using the software for an initial round of coding, I found the efficiencies that came with this tool started to hinder my ability to maintain a strong degree of data familiarisation and constant comparison of coding decisions. I therefore agreed with Glaser (2005) that coding software has the possibility of numbing creativity and constraining the coding process into a fixed and static process. Thus, I instead changed over to the ‘old school’ method of cutting and pasting quotes into Word documents, where the tedious nature of constantly copying and pasting quotes beneath the emerging codes and moving concepts and categories around ‘by hand’ kept my analysis in a state of continuous exploration and adaptation.

Two separate coding documents were created for swapping and renting where codes emerged as an outline of headings (categories/themes) and multiple subheadings (concepts). Often the creation of a new heading or subheading required me to revisit interview transcripts to make sure I had not left anything out in my perusal; this constant comparison was reflected in the cyclical representation of the thematic stages shown in **Figure 3.9**. Quotes (long or short) were copied from the transcripts under each relevant heading (sometimes under multiple headings as many codes and topics overlapped) and new codes and headings were constantly created and reorganised. The original “raw” coding documents for swapping and renting were respectively 153, 149 pages long and included 156, 208 total codes.

To illustrate the process of first and second-level coding, I use a simple P2P renting quote as an example: “It’s cheaper than renting it off those rental places” prompted the creation of a multitude of potential code creations such as “Cheaper,” “Thrift,” and “Price.” However, due to internal homogeneity (concepts describing the same idea) these were all later condensed into “Save Money” during theme exploration. The concept of “Save Money” came under the overarching category of an “Economic Motivation” which was later organised under the “Individual Characteristics” manifestation (See **Figure 3.10** for screenshot of the original coding document in its raw form for P2P renting). Note that quotes were usually placed into multiple concepts and categories at this stage. This quote did not only fall under “Save Money” but also prompted the creation of a “P2P versus Business Rentals” concept which fell under the manifestation of “Situational Structural Characteristics” and a number of other subheadings, concepts and themes.

**Figure 3.10** First and Second-Level Coding Example.

I initially analysed renting and swapping data separately (i.e., two rounds of coding). A subsequent mixing of these codes constituted a third round of coding for comparison. Although this could be argued to go against the nature of constant comparison analysis (because I separately coded the different activities and then merged them both together at the end during my write-up), I argue that there was a trade-off decision to be made in this regard. If I had instead first coded everything into one document, then I could come to be explicitly aware of emerging similarities and differences between renting and swapping. I feel this could have pushed my assumptions of these themes onto the data, thus affecting my ability to remain objective. To *compare* the two practices (as outlined in my research

questions), I first needed to understand the two practices as *separate* entities. Further, by coding the two activities separately, a mixing stage of coding essentially meant that the data was coded twice. This enhanced my data familiarisation and discovery because I was looking at the concepts from a wider point of view (i.e., instead of asking the focused question of why people were choosing temporary disposition, I took a step back and asked why they were choosing to engage with alternative consumption in general). Overall, I made this decision to analyse the separate cases linearly because it allowed me to maintain a more rigorous “open” coding.

The third round of coding was initially combined using the categories of “Manifestations of Reality” (individual, societal, and structural influences) that I had incorporated into my theoretical model of theoretical perspectives (**Figure 3.3**). Literature from my integrative literature review<sup>74</sup> was then<sup>75</sup> incorporated into these findings.

As discussed in Chapter Two, grounded theory has had varying instructions for when to include extant knowledge in data analysis. In this instance, I agreed with Kempster and Parry (2011) that ideas and theories from the literature (reviewed in the integrative phase – as discussed in Section 2.1.1) should be used to analyse the data rather than leave it until after the analysis has been fully completed. This supports the ontological depths of critical realism because it allows the theories to be grounded within the context – that is, “theory and data will be consistently and effectively ‘fitted together’ in such a way as to render the nature of the mechanism clearer” (O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2014, p. 17).

During the second-level of coding, it is therefore argued an ‘emergent fit’ can occur when theories and ideas from the literature coincide with the data’s emerging themes (Schreiber, 2001). This is where selective coding takes place, where coding starts to become more theoretically-driven and purposeful (Ghorbani, Moridsadat, & Jafarzadeh, 2015). In other words, “grounded theorists have the necessary freedom to apply a theoretical lens *that fits the data*, whatever that theoretical lens is, *so long as the lens fits and is not forced on the data*” (Urquhart & Fernandez, 2013, p. 228).

At this stage I started to build a theoretical framework (which resulted in the Model of Theoretical Perspectives discussed in Section 3.1.2) that explained the data. Upon reflection, I would argue my

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74 I made this decision because this literature was not used to guide my research questions or interview guides, so to be more clear with the construction of my findings, it made more sense to put the literature where it had been discovered (alongside and after my data collection). Some of this literature was also later placed back into my non-committal review to better introduce the topic in Chapter Two.

75 Although I write “and then” to show sequential steps, I want to reiterate the fact that these reviews and integrations were done in a more cyclical manner throughout data collection and analysis as well as throughout rewriting and redrafting the structure of my thesis.



methods resembled the “In vivo” theory-building approach outlined by Anderson and Kragh (2010) which involves using extant theories as inspiration to build a theoretical framework that fits the data. This approach follows the “all is data” mantra (i.e., theory and data are treated equally), and applies the logic of critical realism and abduction through “the process of generating plausible theoretical propositions from empirical observations” while still continuing “to scan, select and discard theoretical perspectives” with the addition of new data (Anderson & Kragh, 2010, p. 51). The challenges and criticisms that come with this approach are that the researcher runs the risk of being blinded or restricted by the framework and thus may leave out findings that don’t “fit” into the proposed model. However, I did not create my model prior to data collection or analysis. Instead, I built it through constant comparison of emerging data and theories, allowing it to evolve with my theoretical sensitivity. If emerging data did not “fit” into the framework, I re-developed the model to include it. Thus, my model was a crude work in progress throughout analysis rather than a rigid frame in which to mould the data, and was only completed in its final version after my data collection and initial analysis had concluded.

As an example of extant theory “inspiration,” the dimensions introduced by Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) on access-based consumption offered a seamless fit to the emerging themes in the P2P renting coding document as a framework to describe the “Technological Artefact” manifestation of reality. During the third round of coding (mixing renting and swapping), I discovered the access-based consumption dimensions also fit the swapping findings, which brought the two activities back together again under the core category of “reciprocity” (i.e., exchange processes and outcomes). Rather than make up my own terminology to describe the same thing that Bardhi and Eckhardt’s (2012) dimensions<sup>76</sup> were explaining, their terminology was incorporated into my final model (discussed in Section 4.1) as a form of abstract “theoretical codes” (Glaser, 1978). Integrating theoretical codes to the final model allows grounded theories to “appear more plausible, more relevant and more enhanced” (Glaser, 2005, p. 14). This technique follows the premise that “all is data” – “the *source* of certain

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<sup>76</sup> It was only after completing the final stage of data analysis (around August, 2014) that the “emergent fit” of this framework became apparent and was applied as a theoretical lens. In other words, I did not start this research or conduct interviews knowing of this framework, but rather it was discovered during simultaneous literature and data analysis that there was an emergent fit. Indeed, because the popularisation of online swapping and P2P renting websites is so recent, the literature was originally underdeveloped, with almost all of the frameworks and dimensions on collaborative and accessed-based consumption emerging after this research commenced. Thus, although this discussion of my methodology comes after an overview of the extant literature, my knowledge and discovery of the current literature was nowhere near as linear as this rigid thesis structure implies.

ideas, or even ‘models,’ can come from sources other than the data” provided that the theory is “brought into relation to the data” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 6).

**Review and Re-explore Themes.** The fourth step of thematic analysis involved re-exploring the categories/themes (i.e., axial and selective codes) to weed out the weakest links and focus more heavily on the most important themes. Themes were judged using two criteria as defined by Patton (1990): (1) Internal homogeneity (the information within each theme should be similar to each other); and (2) External heterogeneity (the final themes should be different from each other). This took place over the whole analysis as comments and ideas were jotted down within the coding document. These informal notes also acted as a way to reduce subjectivity bias by making a priori assumptions and the process of analysis completely transparent so that I could take a step back from my involvement with the subject.

**Name and Define Themes.** The fifth step to formally name and define themes set the groundwork for third-level coding, which entailed searching for explanations. Using Glaser’s (1978) terminology this would be called looking for “gerunds” that explained the process between (and within) categories and concepts. Most of my codes were written as gerunds (the noun form of verbs; e.g., trusting, distrusting) or as direct verbs (e.g., make money, recoup costs). This allowed me to see the *processes* and interactions of participants. During this step I also defined and reflected on the themes which allowed me to propose “hypotheses or hunches” that could be tested “through further data collection and analysis” by “moving back and forth between inductive and deductive thinking” (Schreiber, 2001, p. 71). For example, one concept for P2P renting was “the gratification to share.” I noticed when a user did not have this inclination they spoke more persistently about the economic motivations to provide items for rent saying it was only worth it for expensive items. I therefore attempted to confirm or refute this relationship by focusing on those questions in subsequent interviews. This fifth step of propositions is known as the final level of abstraction, where grounded “theories” house the emerging pillars of concepts, categories and relationships into a grounded *understanding*.

**Produce the Final Report.** The last step for thematic analysis involved writing the final report. Following the classic approach, the resulting grounded theories can be presented “either as a well-codified set of propositions or in a running text of theoretical discussion, using conceptual categories and their properties” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 31). Glaserian grounded theory argues that the researcher is not meant to “compose” a “story” because grounded theories are not intended to be

descriptive (Glaser, 2002b, paragraph 16). However, I feel for the purpose of readability and application that descriptive accounts of data that are written around conceptualised theories can only *strengthen* them for the current context. This inclusion has been suggested as paramount for critical realism because reality needs to be looked at through different perspectives and contexts (Kempster & Parry, 2011). Thus, this is one instance in which I veered away from Glaser's instruction and followed a writing style closer to the work of Charmaz (2000; 2001).

This concludes the methods used to guide my research. Next, I discuss the evaluative criteria I used to judge my final reporting of theories.

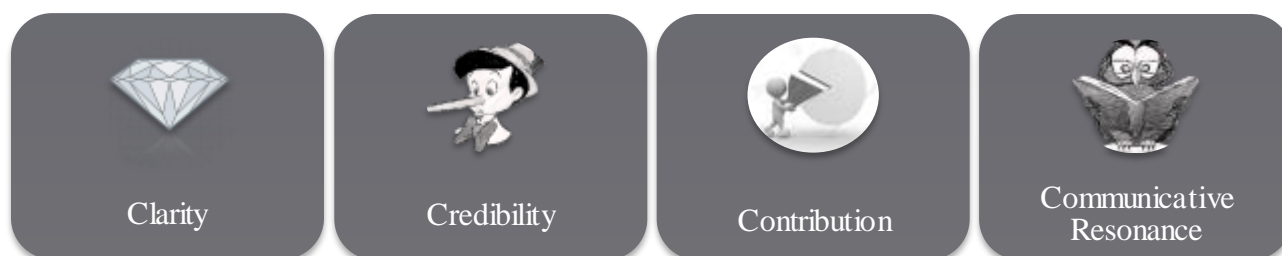
### 3.3.4 Grounded Theory Methods

## Data Appraisal

Traditionally, research has been assessed by the virtues and expectations of positivism. Under this lens, critics form judgements of research quality based on reliability, validity, and generalisability. While these criteria are useful for nomothetic<sup>77</sup> studies, they can also become problematic and incompatible when applied to a constructionist-interpretivist research project. This is because the expectations of findings vary drastically between these traditions. For example, an epistemological constructionist attempts to uncover ideographic knowledge (i.e., context-specific and fluctuating) which by its definitive chaotic nature should not be expected to be reliable (relativist experiences and assumptions are not consistent), valid (from a relativist perspective all interpretations are valid), or generalisable (ideographic knowledge is unique) (e.g., Potter, 1996).

To overcome these issues of unworkable criteria, many scholars have attempted to introduce alternative measures that could be used for evaluating qualitative research (e.g., Madill et al, 2000; Potter, 1996). After reviewing my epistemological assumptions, research questions, and research purpose, I identified most strongly with Finlay's (2006) four dimensions of qualitative evaluation (see **Figure 3.11**) because I believed these dimensions, while still valuing the importance of credibility, added more pragmatic depth (i.e., purpose, meaningfulness, entertainment, creativity/innovation) than traditional appraisal criteria which myopically focus on obtaining "truth" in knowledge (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These dimensions are discussed in the following sections.

**Figure 3.11** Four Dimensions for Qualitative Evaluation identified by Finlay (2006).



*Images have been artistically altered. Originals found via Google's "non-commercial reuse with modification" search engine.*

<sup>77</sup> Although I assumed a critical *realist* rather than relativist ontological stance, critical realism employs a more cautious *epistemology* rooted in relativism. With critical realism, there is "an inherent *subjectivity* [emphasis added] in the production of knowledge" (Madill, Jordan, & Shirley, 2000, p. 3). Further, my interviews explored Perceived and Desired Reality, which when analysed and collected falls closer to a relativist stance on the ontological continuum.

### 3.3.4.1 Grounded Theory Appraisal: **Clarity**



**Clarity:** Was the research coherently described? Was the analysis logically linked together and argued without glaring contradictions?

For “Clarity” I endeavoured to be thoroughly explicit with my chosen research foundations and methodology so that my arguments would follow a logical and hierarchical pattern. To be clearer with my resulting model, a bulk of the literature was written into the Findings chapter rather than the Literature Review chapter. This is because grounded theory views literature as a *source* of data validation rather than as a precursor to a researcher’s pre-assumed hypotheses and guide for exploration (e.g., McCann and Clark, 2003a). Additionally, to better explain the evolving story and context of my emerging theories, the literature added a useful foundation to build a narrative for communicative resonance and educate the reader of extant literature where it is most relevant (rather than in a separate section/chapter and easily forgotten). I used footnotes throughout my paper to clarify my reasoning and opinions. This transparency should hopefully have allowed critics a better insight into any subjectivity that I brought into the analysis, which leads into the next dimension of “Credibility.”

### 3.3.4.2 Grounded Theory Appraisal: **Credibility**



**Credibility:** Were the findings convincingly argued from the data provided? Were extant theories challenged and/or supported? Was the data collection and analysis trustworthy, transferable, dependable, and/or confirmable (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985)?

When it came to “Credibility,” I resonated strongly with pragmatic arguments of common sense and plausibility (e.g., Dervin, 1997; Rennie, Phillips, & Quataro, 1988; Stern, Allen, & Moxley, 1984). For example, Piccinini (2003, p. 4) said we must rely on critical introspection,<sup>78</sup> stressing that “neither agnosticism nor faith [...] is warranted,” but rather we must as critics, reviewers and consumers alike,

<sup>78</sup> Although my research is far from introspection, I still find Piccini’s arguments relevant in defence of the critique that qualitative analysis is biased because of subjective researcher capabilities and interests which drive the exploration, discovery and organisation of themes. Piccinini also provides insightful examples of how we as critical peers can critique others’ writing of interpreted data through introspection.

“consider our everyday, commonsensical reliance on each other’s introspective reports.” With this mind-set, I strove to include participant quotes to allow readers to engage with the participant’s words and come to their own conclusions and interpretations of what was going on in the data. In addition to the use of quotations, I attempted to play devil’s advocate with the emerging theories by pointing out contradictions in the literature and data. Also, instead of only showing the commonly found themes, I included instances of outlying examples which deviated from the pack. I also included some commentary of my own “pre-understanding” (Geanellos, 1998, p. 5) within the findings to make the analysis more transparent. These inclusions allowed me to maintain a higher level of credibility because I was explicit with the emerging theories limitations.

For a more objective and guided evaluation of “Credibility,” I also considered the four criteria put forth by Glaser and Strauss (1967) for critiquing grounded theory studies: (1) Fit – the theories should be built to fit the data rather than the data be forced into preconceived ideas or theories; in other words, all data is important for analysis even if it does not fit a priori assumptions; (2) Work – the theory works to explain the phenomena (discussed under “Clarity”), (3) Relevance – the theories should be useful and interesting (discussed under “Contribution” and “Communicative Resonance”); and (4) Modifiability – the theories are able to be modified with new data. I used these criteria to challenge and rework my emerging theories during data analysis.

I strove to maintain theoretical sensitivity and reflexivity as a form of “Credibility” throughout the research process (which has also been discussed in Chapter Two). I argue that my research questions met the suggestion of Oktay (2012, p. 36) on theoretical sensitivity because they were questions I was “genuinely curious about” as opposed to questions to which I felt I already knew the answers. The only potential bias that I introspectively am aware of would be my enthusiasm for the consumption practices – I wanted them to work so that I could one day have the *choice* to use them. However, I believe this excitement promoted a more interactive co-creation of enabling and constraining factors during the interviews (which influenced my secondary pragmatic research question).

Finally, Finlay’s (2006) dimension of “Credibility” can also address more traditional evaluations of trustworthiness (e.g., Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004) which encourage researchers to use four ideographic criteria for evaluating the quality of research: (1) Credibility; (2) Transferability; (3) Dependability; and (4) Confirmability. The methods that I used to address these criteria are summarised in **Table 3.6**.

**Table 3.6** Evaluative Criteria for Research (e.g., Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

<u>Criterion</u>	<u>Evaluative Goal</u>	<u>Method(s) that Addressed this Criterion</u>
<b>Truth</b>	<p><i>Nomothetic:</i> Internal Validity</p> <p><i>Ideographic:</i> Credibility</p>	<p>Source Triangulation – compared my interview findings to secondary sources of CC founder and user interviews; Also interviewed a few respondents a year later (x2) to see if anything had changed or could be further clarified.</p> <p>Member Checking – shared early rough drafts of my overall findings with two rental participants who were interested (one founder and one two-way user); and one swapping key informant. They gave me feedback and spoke about their reaction to my findings on Skype.</p>
<b>Acceptability</b>	<p><i>Nomothetic:</i> External Validity</p> <p><i>Ideographic:</i> Transferability</p>	<p>Purposive Sampling of different user types and different CC types has broadened my findings so that the resulting theories can become a relevant guide of <i>comparison</i> that is transferable to other CC contexts. A fuller description of the websites in existence during this study has been provided in Appendix C so that comparisons can be made to future websites.</p> <p>Transferability methods are also discussed further in Section 3.3.4.4 under the topic of “Communicative Resonance” and intertextuality.</p>
<b>Consistency</b>	<p><i>Nomothetic:</i> Reliability</p> <p><i>Ideographic:</i> Dependability</p>	<p>Reliable generalisations were <i>not</i> objectives for this study. Time and context were highly relevant factors that placed my findings on an ideographic timeframe (especially as websites have shut down).</p> <p>Instead, I have striven to make my theories <i>modifiable</i> for future CC contexts and thus expect my findings to contribute to our understanding of how (and why) CC experiences/motivations may change (or stay the same).</p>
<b>Neutrality</b>	<p><i>Nomothetic:</i> Objectivity</p> <p><i>Ideographic:</i> Confirmability</p>	<p>Researcher Introspection (disclosure of my pre-understanding and motivations) has equipped readers with the ability to discern potential bias. Deviating from traditional academic prose, I chose to humanise my writing of research decisions and analysis in order to encourage readers to introspect on the findings.</p> <p>This decision was made because of my relativistic/constructionist belief in epistemology where, as researchers and subjects of research, we are interacting with reality and interpretation.</p>

### 3.3.4.3 Grounded Theory Appraisal: **Contribution**



**Contribution:** Was the research *useful* or *surprising* (e.g., Armstrong, 2002)? Have the findings and analysis provided the reader with a better understanding of the phenomena? Has the analysis provided answers *or* sparked new questions to ponder for future research?

As for “Contribution” I reconsidered the implications for my research as well as the pragmatic research question to discover enabling factors that could help promote the usage of renting and swapping. The focus was to contribute a *context*-based description and explanation of the motivations and experiences of these activities, as well as the effect of these activities (i.e., reproduced or transformed perceptions). Further, by having a better understanding of these features, I also co-created enabling and constraining factors which founders of these websites should focus on to make the experience more enduring and to help non-users break through perceived barriers (e.g., low perceived behavioural control) that hinder their participation. Going beyond mere descriptions, I also strove to develop theories which explain the understandings that participants provided of their current situation, website usage, and personal dispositions. But what is a grounded theory specifically?

“The interrelated jobs of theory in sociology are: (1) to enable prediction and explanation of behaviour; (2) to be useful in theoretical advance in sociology; (3) to be usable in practical applications – prediction and explanation should be able to give the practitioner understanding and some control of situations; (4) to provide a perspective on behaviour – a stance to be taken toward data; and (5) to guide and provide a style for research on particular areas of behaviour”

(Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 3).

From this quote I agreed with everything but want to reiterate my weariness with the term “prediction” – as outlined under my philosophical foundations there is bound to be a “ceiling” for predictability because of “the contradictory behaviour of the uncontrolled world” (Bhaskar, 1978, p. 119). This is because the mechanisms existing in the Desired Reality dimension do not always manifest as actual events even if they are “real.” However, I do concede that my resulting theory and theoretical models may have the power to predict generative mechanisms or *tendencies* of swapping and renting with future research. Further, a critical realist perspective suggests at least *local* (i.e., context-based compared to general) causality can be understood by exploring “the actual events and processes that led to specific outcomes” (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 132). This is because qualitative research is



able to look at individuals' "reasoning and circumstances in a specific context" (Sayer, 2000, p. 23). Thus, as explained by "process theory" (e.g., Mohr, 1982), local causation may be explained by showing the *process* of "an earlier event" being followed by "a subsequent event" as told directly from an interview participant (Weiss, 1994, p. 179).

I therefore attempted to incorporate tendencies and processes in my grounded theories within the third-level "relationship" codes (discussed in Section 3.3.1). Further, following the advice of Maxwell (2008, p. 176), rather than implicitly throwing around claims "that something 'influences,' 'impacts,' 'shapes,' 'produces,' or 'transforms' something else" I attempted to make these causal claims more explicit with the appropriate evidence (i.e., by showing the *process* of events being followed by events). However, as explained by critical realism, causal powers do not always manifest in reality. Thus, I also included a discussion of user preferences (i.e., tendencies) as causal powers even if they did not impact behaviour and actually occur.

### 3.3.4.4 Grounded Theory Appraisal: **Communicative Resonance**



**Communicative Resonance:** Were the findings artistically vivid enough to elicit "out-of-text intertextualities" *or* interest in the phenomena?

For "Communicative Resonance," I considered artistic merits with regards to how this thesis unfolded. In other words, how could I endeavour to provide the "best explanation" of what I had discovered in the data? According to Weick, (1989, p. 517) a good theory should be "high in narrative rationality, aesthetically pleasing, or correspondent with presumed realities." As others from the literature on evaluating qualitative studies have continuously stressed, I do not believe my findings can be generalised to everyone.<sup>79</sup> However, through communicative resonance my findings can become a descriptive story which allows people to become interested in the phenomena (a prerequisite for future research and contribution in that area). The final concepts generated in a theory should also "have instant 'grab'" so readers can see "a pattern in an event or happening that makes them feel they understand with 'know how' [...] what they see" (Glaser, 2002a, p. 16).

<sup>79</sup> Indeed, to be able to generalise (i.e., apply theories in a new context) I would need to assume realities across contexts are the same (i.e., assume uniformity of nature) – which I have argued they are not. Thus, generalisation can never be *fully* justified because my ontological assumption of critical realism assumes diversity and change as *valid* layers of reality.

The richness of my findings may also have provided certain grades of transferability to various readers who became engaged in the narrative by thinking to themselves, “I get this” or “me too.” Such inner agreements are what Hirschman (2002, p. 59) identified as out-of-text intertextuality, whereby “consumers link actions and/or characters in a given fictional text to actual people or events.” If such thoughts occurred with anyone reading my analysis, I could say this intertextuality has corroborated on the transferability of my findings. Thus, through communicative resonance my “findings [*could*] be transferred and [*might*] have meaning or relevance if applied to other individuals, contexts and situations” (Finlay, 2006, p. 3-4). This intertextuality also reminds me of Kempster and Parry’s (2011, p. 118) application of critical realism to grounded theory, which suggested a grounded theory should “be ‘offered up’ for other researchers to critique for its usefulness in other contexts” where “the aim is not to prove or disprove but rather compare explanations.”

It is therefore not up to me as the author and researcher to suggest how or if my findings can be transferable to other contexts. Instead, by providing communicative resonance and ensuring that sufficient contextual information and descriptions are provided, I am able to pass the responsibility of discovering threads of transferability to the reader. If the reader experiences out-of-text intertextuality and believes their situation as comparable to that described in my findings, they may then use my findings as theoretical inspiration for their own inquiries (e.g., Bassey 1981, Firestone, 1993). Thus, as Shenton (2004) said in agreement to Borgman (1986), when it comes to transferability, “understanding of a phenomenon is gained gradually, through several studies, rather than one major project conducted in isolation [...] and, if an appreciation can be gained of the *reasons* behind the variations, this understanding may prove as useful to the reader as the results actually reported” (p. 71).

This concludes the evaluative criteria I applied to my research methods and reporting of theories. I now turn to the findings from my interviews with renting and swapping respondents.



(Section 4.11) **Dimensionalising the Field of Collaborative Consumption:** Thematic analysis became guided around the six referential questions of what (Type of Transferred Object), how (Consumer Involvement), when (Temporality), where and with whom (Anonymity), and why (Market Mediation and Political Consumerism). These are used to organise the main concepts and theories discovered in the data.



## (Section 4.22) Type of Transferred Object (What):

The intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics of objects being exchanged as well as the individual and situational usage factors tied to the objects are discussed under the main topics of “Types of Transferred Objects to Provide” and “Types of Objects to Take.”



## (Section 4.33) Consumer Involvement (How):

The actions, processes and efforts required by Providers and Takers in fulfilling and governing the exchange are discussed as co-creation factors of Collaborative Consumption before, during, and after the exchange.



## (Section 4.44) Temporality (When):

The time period of Consumer Involvement is explained using three levels of temporality: frequency, duration, and timing of communication and reciprocity.



## (Section 4.55) Anonymity (Who and Where):

The roles, social norms, and interactions of people involved in the exchange as well as the place or context in which these things reside, perform processes, or connect to other things is applied to the interview findings.



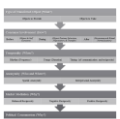
## (Section 4.66) Market Mediation (Why):

The motivating factors and mechanisms driving users to provide and take via swapping and renting exchange are explored via three levels of reciprocity: negative, balanced, and positive.



## (Section 4.77) Political Consumerism (Why):

Online swapping and P2P renting are applied as sustainable options for alternative consumption as perceived by respondents under the topic of political consumerism.



## (Section 4.88) Findings Summary:

A table is provided as a summary to show the main topics discussed in this chapter.

## 4.1 Dimensionalising the Field of Collaborative Consumption

During my second phased (integrative) literature review, the most influential theoretical lens came from Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) with their examination on car sharing. They introduced six dimensions (i.e., continuums) to parametrise access-based consumptionscapes. These are briefly described below in their original order:

- (1) **Temporality** – Duration of access can range from one-off to longitudinal transactions and the duration of usage for the accessed item can range between short-term or long-term use.
- (2) **Anonymity** – Interpersonal interactions can range from anonymous to personal and spatial interaction between the object and consumer can be private or public.
- (3) **Market Mediation** – Consumption can range from for-profit to not-for-profit.
- (4) **Consumer Involvement** – Exchange co-creation can involve limited full-service to extensive self-service.
- (5) **Type of Accessed Object** – Objects can range from experiential to functional value and from material to immaterial formats.
- (6) **Political Consumerism** – Consumption can be a political strategy to be more sustainable or community oriented (ranging from nil to extreme).

At first, I found these dimensions as useful categories for describing the nature of temporary disposition and acquisition (i.e., access-based consumption). However, as I started applying the dimensions to the P2P renting data, I realised they also organised swapping codes. Thus, a final<sup>80</sup> coding round became theoretically-driven to place my original themes within the six dimensions, which I found could help model all CC exchange types.

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<sup>80</sup> This coding and interpretation was conducted after applying initial codes to each swapping/renting coding document, and after the initial mixing document (these documents and analyses were discussed in Section 3.3.3).

As introduced in Section 3.1.2, I embraced a multi-perspectives ontologies framework (Kingston, 2008), where six “epistemic referential questions” (Kearsley, 1976, p. 351) must be asked in research.<sup>81</sup> For example, my interviews typically covered the influences a consumer may face with second-hand acquisition-disposition decisions: *What* to acquire/dispose, *How* to acquire/dispose, *Why* to acquire/dispose, from *Whom* to acquire/dispose, *Where* to acquire/dispose, and *When* and for how long to acquire/dispose their items. These questions broadly explored my research questions for distinguishing between the nature of exchange between swapping and renting and the motivations between Providers and Takers.

During my integrative phased literature review, I discovered these six questions also aligned with Bardhi and Eckhardt’s (2012) dimensions, and was therefore inspired to re-explore the data and interpretation from my initial analysis<sup>82</sup> through the lens of six referential questions:

- (1) **What**, “Type of [~~Accessed~~ Transferred]<sup>83</sup> Object” - the intrinsic and extrinsic characteristics of objects being exchanged as well as the individual and situational factors tied to using the objects;
- (2) **How**, “Consumer Involvement” - the actions, processes and efforts required by Providers and Takers in fulfilling and governing the exchange;
- (3) **When**, “Temporality” - the time period and frequency of exchange;
- (4) **Where** - the place or context in which these things reside, perform processes, or connect to other things, which is directly linked to the “Anonymity” dimension;
- (5) **Who**, “Anonymity” - the roles, social norms, and interactions of people involved in the exchange; and
- (6) **Why**, “Market Mediation” and “Political Consumerism” - the motivations, causes, justifications, and objectives for the exchange.

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81 These questions are also essential steps for “axial coding” under Strauss and Corbin’s (1998) strategy for grounded theory analysis, which looks to the data to answer “when, where, why, who, how, and with what consequences” (p. 125). Upon re-reading their methods, I was initially interested in organising my data within their organising scheme of conditions (why, where, and when), actions (who and how), and consequences (what was the outcome). However, when I realised Bardhi and Eckhardt’s (2012) dimensions also matched these referential questions, I thought these categories would allow for a more interesting structure for my findings and allow me to better explore each referential question in more detail; especially because all of my findings easily fit into each dimension without any effort or forcing.

82 My initial mixing of the swapping and renting documents was organized around motivations and deterrents within the three different manifestations of reality (individual, societal, structural/technological; defined in Section 3.1.2). These were then integrated into my theoretical model and within the relevant referential question (which allowed me to explore themes as gerunds and processes rather than concepts).

83 I changed Bardhi and Eckhardt’s terminology from “Accessed” to “Transferred;” To be explained in Section 4.2.

Although this chapter is presented as a linear presentation of these themes, these *Referential Dimensions* were not mutually exclusive. For example, discussing the “Type of Transferred Object” also explained *why* people became involved with swapping and/or renting, *how* involved they wanted to become, how often and *when* they wanted to become involved, and so on. Throughout this chapter I attempt to point out the main occurrences where an idea overlaps with another dimension. I now turn to my first theme of “*What do we have here?*”, the “Type of Transferred Object.”

## 4.2 Type of Transferred Object

The *type* of good being acquired, used, or disposed plays a critical role for consumer decision-making (e.g., Albinsson & Perera, 2009; Belk, 1975; DeBell and Dardis, 1979; Paden & Stell, 2005; Shim, 1995). Thus, to understand why users would engage in disposition or acquisition, I encouraged respondents to discuss their preferences for *types of items* they wanted to access or provide online through swapping and renting. Their discussions revealed typical situations where a swapping/rental Provider or Taker could emerge.

Through my findings, I suggest broadening Bardhi and Eckhardt's (2012) dimension beyond the original two distinctions (experiential-functional and material-immaterial continuums) so the "Type of [Transferred]<sup>84</sup> Object" can be more thoroughly explored around four major influences: (1) Intrinsic Characteristics; (2) Individual Decision-Making Styles about objects; (3) Situational Usage Factors guiding perceptions of objects; and (4) Extrinsic Characteristics. These influences affect the Perceived, Actual, and Desired Realities around the types of objects considered suitable for transfers via swapping/renting exchange.

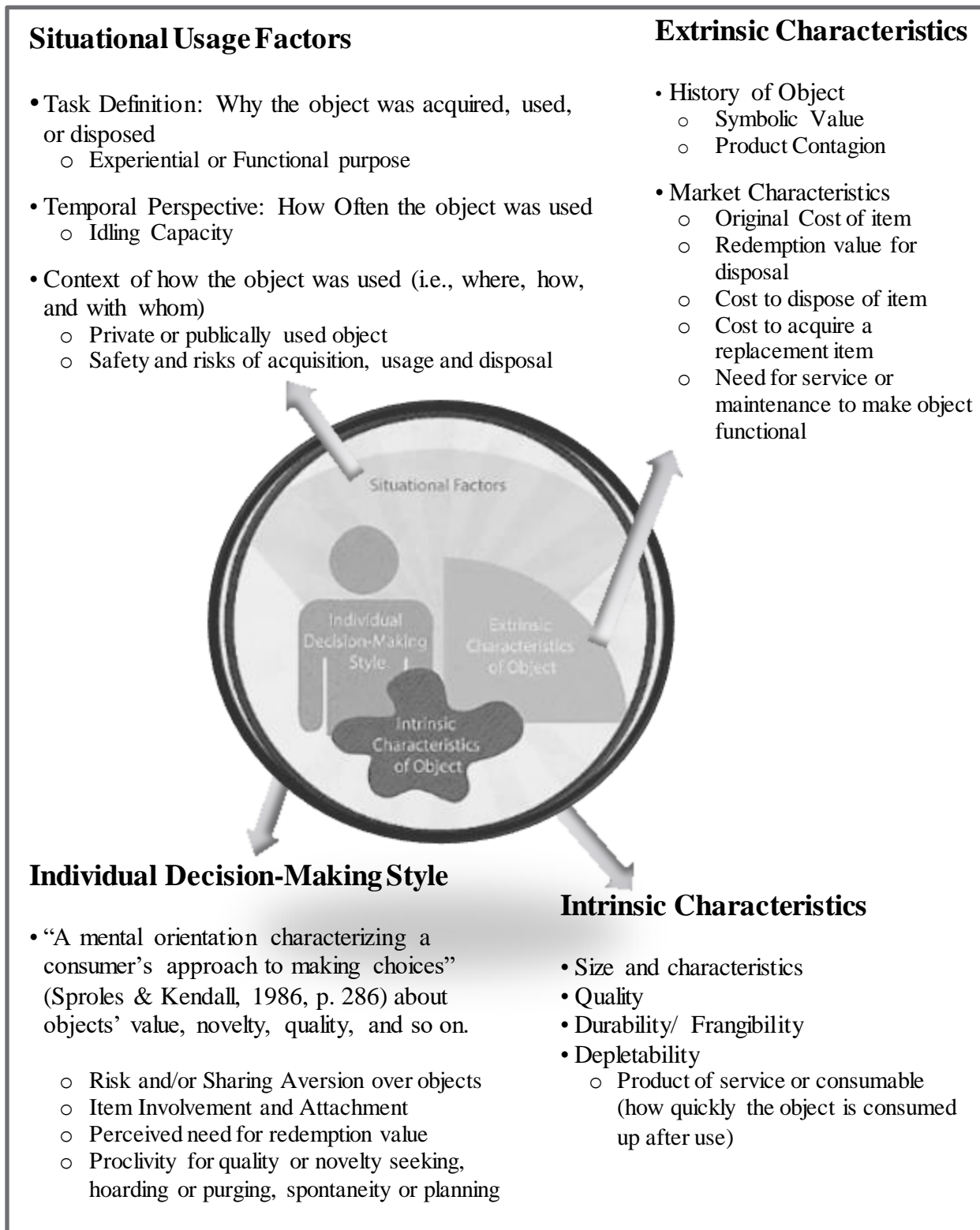
This dimension is split into three parts. First, I briefly define the four influences around objects as supported by the literature and exemplified through my findings (summarised as examples in **Figure 4.1**, Section 4.2.1) so these terms can be used freely throughout the remaining sections. Then, to understand the perspective of Providers versus Takers, I split the remainder of this dimension into two main discussions: **Types of objects to Provide** through disposition (4.2.2) and **Types of objects to Take** through acquisition (4.2.3).

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<sup>84</sup> I changed Bardhi and Eckhardt's terminology from "Accessed" to "Transferred" because even though P2P renting does not come with a transfer of ownership, it still comes with a transfer of power over the object. Furthermore, consumers do not always access or use acquired items – this can happen with temporary or permanent acquisition. For example, I've rented DVDs before but never had a chance to watch them, so although the object was transferred to me temporarily I never accessed its usage value. Likewise, with swapping, users may swap for an item and never access its usage if it turns out to be something they don't want after all. Thus, "transferred" seemed a more encompassing definition that doesn't put any requirement of "use" to the taker.

## 4.2.1 Four Influences on the Type of Transferred Object

**Figure 4.1** Four Influences affecting the “Type of Transferred Object” Dimension.





## 4.2.2 Types of Objects to **Provide** *through Disposition*



Looking first at the types of objects respondents said they had sought to Provide, I found a wide array of examples. Many categories crossed over to each activity – for example costumes, clothes, books, and cameras were suitable for both swapping and renting. The various objects swapping and renting respondents said they had listed to provide are listed in **Figure 4.2**.

**Figure 4.2** Types of Objects Providers desired to Swap and Rent out.

### Swapping Disposition Objects:

Pants, Christmas ornaments, jacket, sister's jeans, shoes, handbags, clothes, jewellery, a necklace, a pair of earrings, materials to repurpose, French maid costume, Halloween costumes, a USB drive, band-aids, a cotton candy machine, a friend's car, dresses, a ring, eye shadow, camera, books, DVDs, CDs, remote air swimmers, a boat, small deep freezer, a bottle of Jim Bean, lightly used makeup, skin care items.

### Renting Disposition Objects:

Electric bicycle, books, wall studs, cooking appliances, hair dryer, kids play cubby, seasonal stuff, cooler/chilly bin, helmets, vacuum cleaner, clothes, an old bike, rumba vacuum, tents, yard tools, chocolate fountain, waffle maker, Petanque balls, dresses, juicer, xBox, golf clubs, iPad, kayak, DVD camcorder, bicycle, massage table, camera, popup tents, tools, textbook, clown and gorilla costumes, gramophone.

Swapping Providers often made the decision to dispose objects they perceived as *no longer useful* due to *Situational Usage Factors* of changes in consumer needs; for example, Richard posted a “deep freezer that had a front opening door [...] because the area [he] had it in was really a bit too small for the front opening,” Rose swapped her old clothes which no longer fitted her post-pregnancy, Kelly swapped out Christmas ornaments because she no longer had a Christmas tree, and Sarah swapped her old frame which she was no longer using and was “just collecting dust on [her] desk.”

Alternatively, rental Providers often considered their items as *still useful*, yet having *Idling Capacity* due to *Situational Usage Factors*. For example, two-way rental user Lynne explained because she liked to go camping, she still found her tent valuable and worth keeping, but because she only went “camping twice a year” she was “happy to rent it out the other 50 weekends.” Two-way rental user Lynne explained she was motivated to rent out her tent because she rarely went camping. Although she was able to give a logical reason for why she may want to rent out her tent (i.e., idling capacity), *none* of my renting respondents gave an example to which they had a need or desire to rent out their things prior to knowing about P2P renting websites full of willing Takers.

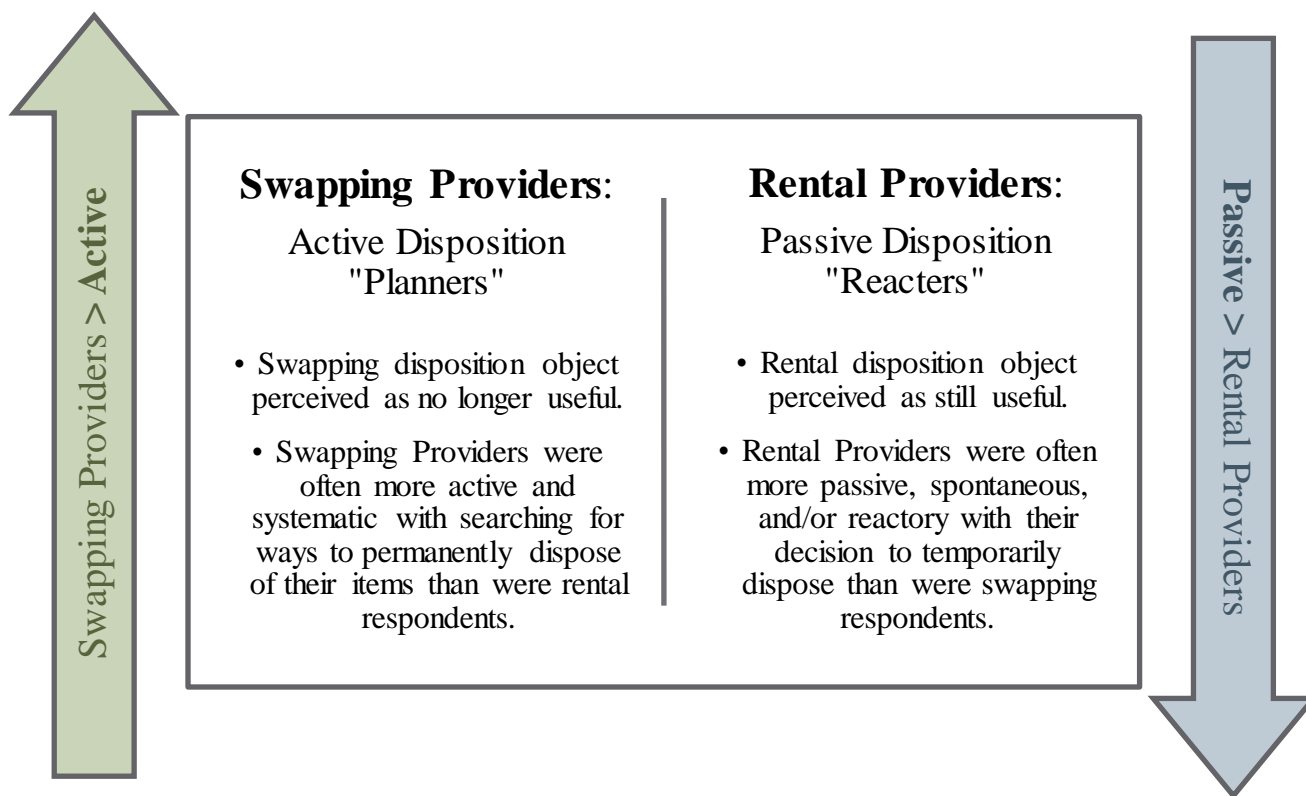
Swapping Providers were faced with *Situational Usage Factors* which made them cognisant of their **items being no longer useful or feasible to keep**.

Rental Providers were faced with *Situational Usage Factors* which made them cognisant of their **items having idling capacity**.

When I asked rental Providers how they had first heard about P2P renting, Actual and Desired rental Providers listed off *passive*, rather than active, *disposition search occurrences* – such as: tech blogs, word of mouth, job postings, or local meetup events. Providers never described a *disposition situation* to which they had been motivated to temporarily dispose something. Thus, prior to knowing about P2P renting, respondents said they had usually engaged in Resistant Disposition (storing their idle things) as the idea to rent their items out for a fee had never crossed their mind. For those respondents motivated beyond economic redemption, such as sharing and seeing their things being enjoyed and used, the Temporary Disposition approach to share with others had sometimes been taken. However, this approach also entailed passive searching. Providers rarely thought, “I need to lend this item out – let me go find someone to lend it temporarily;” rather, they usually reacted to someone’s interest in their item. I therefore found rental Providers were more often spontaneous and reactive with their decision to temporarily dispose.

Alternatively, when I asked swapping Providers how they came across swapping websites, respondents recollected *active disposition search occurrences* – specific instances where they actively searched for disposition options. Swapping Provider Kelly said she “just went online one day looking,” while Rose similarly recollected “I actually went on to search for sites that you could get rid of your clothing that you don’t wear, things like that, [...] so that’s how I found out about it.” I therefore found swapping Providers were more often active and systematic with their decision to permanently dispose. However, because swapping entailed simultaneous disposition and acquisition, swapping disposition was conducive to both “spontaneous” and “systematic” disposers (Harrell & McConocha, 1992). For example, respondents like Kelly and Rose who systematically searched for ways to dispose their items were able to immediately list their swapping items to the website. In contrast, Providers more inclined to spontaneous disposition (i.e., not listing their item ahead of time), could be encouraged to swap by finding something they desired which would prompt them to spontaneously choose something to offer to complete the trade.

These differences between permanent and temporary disposition by swapping and rental Providers are illustrated in **Figure 4.3**.

**Figure 4.3** Individual Disposition Decision-Making Style: “Planners” versus “Reactors.”

The Types of Objects to provide through permanent and temporary disposition are best explained by three main motivations: **Value-seeking** (4.2.2.1); **Gratification-seeking** from an item's legacy and continued use (4.2.2.2); and **Housekeeping** of items (4.2.2.3).

### 4.2.2.1 Types of Objects to Provide:

## Seeking Value in Disposition



A prominent Desired Reality for disposition came from the *Individual Decision-Making Style* of value-seeking, or from a Provider standpoint, being conscious about the value of items.

I observed a *continuum* of value-seeking Providers with two extreme styles: (1) Terminal Redeemers - those who *reacted* to their items' history; and (2) Instrumental Rationalists - those who *acted* on their items' worth (summarised in **Table 4.1**). I used the terminology "terminal" and "instrumental" to emphasise the type of materialism held for the object. For example, Csikszentmihayli and Rochber-Halton (1978) distinguished between (1) Instrumental materialism – where objects are valued as tools for *doing* consummation, and (2) Terminal materialism – where objects are valued as an end in itself, such as *having* and *possessing* the object. These Redeemer-Rationalist decision styles also aligned with purgers and packrats (Coulter & Ligas, 2003). However, because "packrat" implies that a consumer chooses to hold onto their belongings (thus engaging in Resistant Disposition), I would say packrat tendencies fall further left on the continuum of disposition than "Redeemers."

**Table 4.1** Individual Decision-Making Styles for Value-Seeking Providers.

Terminal Redeemers	Instrumental Rationalists
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attached to the item's value, may experience an endowment effect (i.e., sees the item as a "thing" rather than "object")</li> <li>• Packrats, likely to engage in Resistant Disposition without engaging in dispossession</li> <li>• Cognisant of object history (e.g., positive charge, original cost, previous use)</li> <li>• Concerned with sunk costs</li> <li>• Likely to require a higher redemption value for disposal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detached from the item (i.e., sees the item as an "object" rather than "thing"; see Brown, 2004)</li> <li>• Purgers, likely to engage in Temporary or Permanent Disposition</li> <li>• Cognisant of object value as well as maintenance and disposal costs</li> <li>• Concerned with opportunity costs</li> <li>• Less of an endowment effect</li> </ul>

The chosen decision style changed as a result of variations in the object (e.g., quality or functionality deterioration), the Provider (e.g., materialistic tendencies, role transitions), and the *Situational* context (e.g., trend obsolescence, what the item was used for and how often this occurred).

#### 4.2.2.1.1 Value-Seeking in Disposition:

##### Terminal Redeemers

“**Redeemers**,” were influenced by the perceived waste of items and perceived the benefit (rental fee or item swapped) as attached to the object’s history (i.e., they mostly valued getting back the original cost for their provided item). This decision style was especially common for rental Providers because temporary disposition implied they still had an attachment to their item and did not want to permanently dispose of it. Further, because the efforts required for renting exchange were often perceived to be high, many rental Providers exhibited an unrealistic expectation for their object’s redemption value. This can be explained by economic theory’s “endowment effect” which dictates a Provider often demands more than they would be willing to pay to acquire their item (Thaler, 1980). This occurs when Providers place greater importance on losses than on gains (a typical tendency for **Redeemers** because they were attached to their item’s original cost). A “terminal materialist” who finds value in an object for the sake of owning it rather than its instrumental use is by its definition more likely to exhibit an endowment bias that owning something makes it more valuable (e.g., Kahneman & Knetsch, 1991).

However, because swapping Providers usually posted items they perceived as no longer useful and which they would otherwise give or throw away, I found a lesser preference for the swapping **Redeemer** style. Still, items which had been expensive or held sentimental value were more likely to activate packrat tendencies where swapping redeemers considered their object’s history and value to redeem an item with the same value.

Many rental Providers (particularly **Redeemers**) were reluctant to list items they perceived as too risky to lose (e.g., expensive, breakable, important). For example, Charlotte said she had to ease her husband into the idea of providing things to rent, only posting things “he [didn’t] really mind too much if it [got] damaged or whatever.” This had to do with items having to be “not precious” as Martin explained, as most Providers said they could just replace or fix the item using the money from the bond without any issues. However, if, as Bailey put it, Providers were “personally tied to it,” then they became more hesitant to risk the item even with a bond in place. This personal importance suggests rental Providers were unwilling to rent out items which contributed to their extended selves (Belk, 1988) – because they felt incomplete without them, even temporarily. Alternatively, items outside the extended self were more likely to have high idling capacity and barely used. For example, rental

Provider Charlotte was okay with renting out an expensive SLR camera because she didn't "use it that often" (and thus she exhibited more of a "Rationalist" mind-set with disposition of this object).

However, there were differences between rental respondents with respect to what types of objects were perceived as too important to provide for rent. Respondents were sometimes concerned for the financial or sentimental value, or that the item wouldn't be available for personal use. For the latter concern, the literature has suggested many consumers fear there aren't enough goods to go around, implicit in the idea of resources as scarce. Hirschl et al. (2003) found most of their respondents felt if they shared goods with others, they wouldn't be able to access them for themselves, mirroring the findings of Lamberton and Rose (2012) on commercial sharing schemes and Scholl's (2006, p. 31) discussion of the "perceived lack of control" renters can face in PSS encounters. The loss of private ownership suggests we become dependent on someone else to get wanted resources (Belk, 2010). Thus, rental "**Redeemers**" were sometimes reluctant to provide their items to rent out because they did not want to give up their control over access to the object – just in case. For example, rental Provider Martin explained he was "trying to be more self-sufficient and always having things on hand."

**Redeemers** shared the mindset of "packrats" who "view disposition as a potential waste of money" due to being "mindful of the financial investment in their possessions, and conscious of being thrifty" (Coulter & Ligas, 2003, p. 40). Thus, Redeemers engaged in disposition to capture their object's "redemption value" – the residual utility gained from disposition (Parasuraman & Grewal, 2000). Redeemers often had a desire to mitigate the cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) they experienced from unused utility (Bolton & Alba, 2011) and/or sunk cost (Arkes & Blumer, 1985). This was mostly experienced for items which had been expensive, not yet used to their expected capacity, or acquired with a "positive charge" (Lastovicka & Fernandez, 2005), such as gifts or hand-me-downs.<sup>85</sup>

Temporary disposition gave **Redeemers** a chance to mitigate their regret over buying something and not using it enough, because through providing their item for rent they were given the opportunity to recoup some of those costs and maintain ownership over their item for future usage or disposition benefits. Likewise, swapping provided the chance to acquire something with the same economic value as their transferred item rather than sell it at a loss.

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<sup>85</sup> Indeed, when an object has been acquired with a positive charge, research has found packrats are more likely to perceive their stuff as an extension of their selves (e.g., Belk, 1988) as they have a strong emotional relationship with their possessions (e.g., Arnould, 2007; Fournier, 1998; Lastovicka & Sirianni, 2011; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988) due the object's strong association with memories of people, places, and past events in the reinforcement of one's sense of self (e.g., Cherrier & Ponner, 2010; Richins, 1994; Solomon, 1995).

Rental Provider Ariel exhibited a **Redeemer** decision style when she wanted to redeem the original \$160 cost of her gramophone, which she perceived as expensive and risky to rent out. However as soon as she rented it out enough times (“four renters renting it out for \$40 a week [...] made up \$160”), her narrative shifted slightly – she became less concerned with how her item was treated or if it got lost because everything beyond that was profit. Thus, through her experience with temporary disposition, Ariel was able to sever her attachment to the item by letting her overlook its *Extrinsic Characteristics* (e.g., original cost). Ariel’s disposition required item detachment from the self (Young & Wallendorf, 1989) – in this case the item detachment came from her attachment to her gramophone’s original cost. Thus, Redeemers usually had not yet gone through a process of “dispossession,” which Roster (2001) defined as the “severance of the relationship between a consumer and a possession” (p. 425).

Swapping **Redeemers** usually considered original cost (*Extrinsic Characteristics*) and showed a reluctance to give their items away for too little return. Redeemers still considered their items in good condition and to be worth its original price; thus they would price their item with the exact (or an inflated) dollar amount it had cost them so they could make a dollar-for-dollar exchange. Corrine’s experience of a swap she perceived as imbalanced provides an example of a swapping “Redeemer” style:

“I asked the girl for a bunch of things because I originally got [a tank top] in a swap where I gave the girl a lot of things because it’s a really nice like silk expensive designer top, and I wanted to like recoup what I originally traded for it.”

The “**Redeemer**” decision-style was sometimes frowned upon by respondents. For example, Two-way rental user Leigh provided a perspective on the general distrust and wariness of sentimental Redeemers:

“I was at a garage sale [...] and this woman had this pile of jewellery and I kept picking out things and she was like, ‘Oh my grandma gave that to me,’ and I was like, ‘Well then you shouldn’t be selling it! What’s your problem?’ and she was so reluctant to give it up and she wanted me to give her a higher price because her grandma gave it to her and I was like, ‘Dude if you value it so highly you can’t be selling it on the street right now’ but [...] I’m a really empathetic person so I was like ‘Oh I understand’ and first I offered for her to not sell it and then of course I increased my offer because I fell right into her stupid trap.”

Many swapping users were deterred from users with a **Redeemer** decision-making style. For example, Lauren said, “It doesn’t pay to be greedy.” Swapping user Sarah agreed, “oftentimes I get very turned off by people who get very snobbish about their items so I usually will just sort of keep it in the back of my head ‘this person’s probably difficult to swap with’ so I may not swap with them.”

#### 4.2.2.1.2 Value-Seeking in Disposition: Instrumental Rationalists

“**Rationalist**” Providers can be characterised as more *outward-oriented* and *pragmatic*, perceiving their items as inventory they could cash in on rather than something they needed to recoup to make up for their item’s history. For this decision style, the benefit received (money for renting and a desired item for swapping) was perceived as separate to the item. Thus, Rationalists had no special attachment to their items and their mental calculations of value were not biased toward the original cost or sentimental ties. This is because they had already dispossessed themselves of these attachments. Instead, Rationalists considered the cost of disposal<sup>86</sup> compared to what they could get (i.e., opportunity costs). Rationalists could also be seen as micro-entrepreneurs (e.g., Pless, 2012) being empowered to make and/or save money by using their belongings.

“**Rationalists**” were motivated by the opportunity to get money from rental fees or save money with their newly acquired item from a swap. Rental Provider Jack exemplified the most extreme case of a disposition Rationalist with his history of selling, using the term “product” to describe his provided items:

“I envisioned myself as someone who would rent my things to people because I’m somewhat of an online entrepreneur, so I saw a potential for that, [...] so looking at it from the stance of somebody who has sold a lot of products on eBay, somebody who’s sold a lot of products on Craigslist, and [...] thousands of products on amazon.com...”

Many rental Providers mirrored rental Provider Bob’s statement: “I was looking forward to making a bit of money.” The popular press was brimming with examples of Providers making profits. For example, the founder of Rentalic made US\$300 in the course of a year by providing his

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86 (Discussed further under the *Consumer Involvement* dimension in Section 4.3.4) - For renting, this involved the drop off and pick up of the item (perceived time and effort), while swapping also involved sending an item in the mail (money for postage fees).



lawnmower, disco ball and snow chains for rent (Warnick, 2012), while a member on Zilok reportedly made US\$1,015 renting out his camera over nine months (Marsh, 2008) and the average Rentoid member made US\$200 per month renting out video gaming systems (Chicotsky, 2012). However, the Perceived Reality of most respondents paralleled rental Provider Jack's complaint: "I wasn't making any money on it."

Part of this disparity may be because rental Providers were not able to post their items with a high enough price. Although Rationalists did not exhibit an endowment effect, they still considered the disposal costs compared to benefits (i.e., opportunity costs). Thus, **Rationalists** felt an endowment from losing their time and effort rather than temporarily losing the object (likewise swapping Providers considered the price of shipping). There was therefore a fine line between, as rental Provider Bob explained, "Charging a reasonable price" to make it worthwhile for the Provider and yet "not enough to motivate [Takers] to go buy it themselves."

Many rental Providers said they weren't concerned their items would get worn down by rental Takers, which represented a decision style of low attachment to items (i.e., **Rationalists**). For example, Charlotte said she didn't mind lending out things which weren't "going to be a big deal if it [got] a little bit damaged [...] as long as it [was] superficial stuff that [didn't] affect how it [worked]." Similarly, Ariel "didn't really care much" about checking for damage with the clown costume she rented out because it "wasn't worth a lot" and "it was just [her] little way of helping and listing things." However, she said she "might be a bit worried" with renting out her gramophone and whether "they would break it or not." As Ariel stipulated, "it just depend[ed] on what item" was being transferred. Thus, *Intrinsic Characteristics* dictated rental objects be durable while *Extrinsic Characteristics* dictated rental items be hardly used and not precious.

Because swapping Providers usually had already gone through a process of dispossession (i.e., they posted items which they perceived as not useful to them and which they would otherwise give or throw away), economic redemption value was not always important. This was especially common if the item was considered useless or lower quality. Many swapping Providers perceived their items as inadequate because they were something they wanted to get rid of (this is in contrast to renters who still wanted to maintain access over an item they still valued). For example, even when swapping Provider Amanda perceived her items to be in good condition, she often felt like her items were unsatisfactory because she no longer found any use with them – saying "Oh I got this really cool thing and I sent them junk!"

Rather than focusing on the item's original value, swapping Providers were motivated by the mere opportunity to get something they wanted. Swapping **Rationalists** considered the item's value and whether they were likely to be able to negotiate for something they wanted in a swapping exchange. For example, Amanda chose only to swap out brand name or expensive items because they were more likely to give her leverage in negotiating items. However, rather than considering the loss of their item, swapping Rationalists usually considered the opportunity cost of their item (i.e., could they have gotten something better for their item with another trader) and the cost of their exchange (e.g., shipping cost of their item for what they were receiving). For example, Jillian said, "for me like brands and that kind of thing don't really matter so the monetary value is not really a big deal [...] for me it's just shipping." This is in contrast to a swapping Redeemer who also considered losing their item as a cost to the exchange.

Swapping **Rationalists** often considered their belongings as temporary objects which could be reswapped. Respondents who gave narratives about being able to just reswap an unwanted item painted a cyclical mindset – swapping Rationalists often swapped to eventually reswap. Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler (1991) empirically found that "goods purchased for eventual resale or barter—as opposed to use—generally do not generate an endowment effect [<sup>87</sup>]," where "use" is synonymous with "ownership" (Levy, 1992, p. 176) and experienced traders are less likely to exhibit endowment effects when compared to inexperienced traders. From my findings I observed experienced "reswappers" mitigating mere ownership effects associated with loss aversion because they perceived putting regretful items back up for swap as a way to negate the usual loss from typical sales. Thus, when Providers were swapping to eventually re-swap (because ownership is associated with the endowment effect; see Morewedge et al., 2009) and did it often (Kahneman et al., 1991 suggested experienced traders were less likely to exhibit endowment effects), swapping allowed Rationalists to dispose unutilised goods with a diminished risk of disposition dissonance.

#### 4.2.2.1.3 Value-seeking in Disposition:

##### Overcoming the Challenges of Castoff Items

Respondents often compared swapping and renting with alternative disposition options. For example, many tried to resell their things to recover their initial purchase cost (known as "unplanned resales,"

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<sup>87</sup> The endowment effect occurs when users assign value to things merely because they are owned; also known as the mere ownership effect.

Chu and Liao, 2007). However, many respondents indicated an often high depreciation on goods sometimes caused them more regret or frustration because they never or barely used it, and they usually got such a low return for it (i.e., these are *Extrinsic Characteristics*).

When it came to the common disposition path of trying to sell items, Denegri-Knott and Molesworth's (2009) findings were supported when numerous respondents criticised the timely efforts which had frequently yielded them inadequate returns. For example, rental Provider Anita complained "a lot of the time [she couldn't] be bothered" because she had usually been "terribly unsuccessful" trying to sell her items in the past. Swapping Provider Amanda similarly criticised, "I found if I was going to sell them, people were gonna give me hardly anything for them!" Thus, swapping and renting allowed Providers a more viable option to dispose *rejected castoff items*.

Rental Provider Barbara described these *rejected castoff items* as "things that no one would necessarily want to buy." For example, swapping Provider Joanna said when it was "something a little bit less imperfect" she would try swapping. Swapping Provider Natalia gave a similar explanation: "a lot of my items that I have aren't brand new and they aren't always in the best quality and typically that's what people are looking for on eBay so that's why it's easier to swap them." Swapping Provider Joanna suggested shipping low quality items was not worth it because shipping could be more expensive than the item's cost: "You can't charge 15-dollar shipping for a pair of rain boots on eBay, no one is going to buy those [...] unless they are like a really high quality or high brand."

Amanda liked swapping as opposed to selling second-hand because it felt like her "things [were] actually worth something instead of before when [she] didn't think they were worth anything," calling it "a new form of currency." Likewise, with renting out electronics Providers said they were able to get a lot more back for their item than if they had tried to sell it. For example, two-way rental user Charlotte said she successfully rented out her iPad for 30 dollars. Because this was only temporary, she could theoretically repeat the exchange and make far more than a final sale.

Swapping and renting disposition options therefore allowed Providers a second chance to get something back for their items. This section has looked at how the value of items had an effect on the type of objects swapping and renting users considered suitable to provide. A continuum of Redeemers and Rationalists (*Individual Decision-Making Styles*) was identified to create a discussion around differing Desired and Perceived Realities of swapping and rental Providers. The next section looks at how the gratification of an item's legacy and continued use had an effect on the types of objects being provided.

#### 4.2.2.2 Types of Objects to Provide:

### Seeking Gratification from an Item's Legacy and Continued Use



An object's history is another *Extrinsic Characteristic* which can influence a consumer's disposition choice. Lastovicka and Fernandez (2005) explained objects can be positively or negatively charged with symbolic value. Negatively charged possessions are more likely to be disposed of willingly and easily, as consumers want to distance themselves from the negative memories associated with objects (e.g., Cherrier & Murray, 2007; McAlexander, 1991), or are less weary with disposing "of objects that lack strong connections to identity" (Phillips & Sego, 2011, p. 441).<sup>88</sup>

Positively charged products with special meaning for consumers are often labelled "never to be sold" contenders for disposition (Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989) and are more likely to be held onto and never shared. However, research has also suggested that disposing of positively charged objects can offer "symbolic immortality" (Cherrier, 2009a, p. 329). For example, consider how some consumers tend to give away their items to people who express interest in their items or remain physically and emotionally close<sup>89</sup> to the original owner (Price, Arnould, & Curasi, 2000).

Many renting and swapping Providers appreciated their item would continue to be used and appreciated rather than sit idle or tossed away. Providers liked to share themselves with Takers through disposition. Accordingly, a "feel good" benefit occurred for users who liked to share because they felt gratified in knowing a special meaning was being shared with the Taker (renter or new owner from a swap). Thus, another Desired Reality for swapping and renting disposition of objects came from the *Individual Decision-Making Style* of gratification-seeking. Similar to the Redeemers and Rationalists in the "Value of Items" theme, I observed a *continuum* of gratification-seeking Providers with two extreme styles: (1) Sentimentalists - those who felt gratification from seeing their things being used and

<sup>88</sup> Whether negatively charged items were acceptable to be held for rental or swap remained unclear after my interviews because none of the respondents spoke of items that carried bad memories; thus it was not a salient or relevant theme.

<sup>89</sup> The theme of physical and emotional proximity is further discussed under the "Anonymity" dimension.

enjoyed; and (2) Cheap<sup>90</sup> Altruists – those who felt gratification from helping others gain access to goods (summarised in **Table 4.2**).

**Table 4.2** Individual Decision-Making Styles for Gratification-Seeking Providers.

Sentimentalists	Cheap Altruists
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attached to the object</li> <li>• Packrats, likely to engage in Resistant Disposition without engaging in dispossession</li> <li>• Cognisant of object history</li> <li>• Likely to require a higher redemption value for disposal and may seek personal connection to Taker</li> <li>• Feel gratification from seeing their possessions passed on and/or used</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May either be attached to or detached from object</li> <li>• Purgers, more likely to engage in Temporary or Permanent Disposition</li> <li>• Enjoy sharing</li> <li>• Feel gratification from helping others gain access to goods</li> </ul>

However, these decision styles were not always mutually exclusive as many respondents claimed to feel gratification from both circumstances. Further, some respondents were not captured by this continuum (i.e., they did not feel any gratification to share). These motivations changed as a result of variations in the object (e.g., whether it had a positive or neutral charge) and the Provider (e.g., materialistic or philanthropic tendencies, proclivity for sharing and need for connection with Takers).

#### 4.2.2.2.1 Sentimentalists seeking Gratification in Disposition

**Sentimentalists** felt gratification from seeing their things being used and enjoyed. This is similar to Herrmann's (1997) observation of garage sale Providers who were more concerned with finding a caretaker for their item than economic gains. For example, Joanna explained why she loved swapping clothes:

"It kinda needs a new person [...] so it's nice that your clothes can kinda live on for someone else instead of just being, you know, thrown or tossed away."

<sup>90</sup> I use the term "cheap altruism" (see Coyne, 2005) because most rental and swapping providers discussed their altruistic tendency as an added benefit to the transaction rather than a case of motivated philanthropy. It is characteristically "cheap" because they were not being purely altruistic and giving without receiving – swappers saved space and received another item for providing while renters maintained ownership and received money for providing. However, in rarer instances, providers' level of altruism *did* cross over to more philanthropic motivations.

Similarly, after describing a coat she had received from a friend, Sarah felt gratified knowing “something that [she] had loved and wanted and HAD was now loved and wanted by someone else” after providing it for swap saying, “I loved this coat for such a long time that I wanted to make sure that it would go to someone that would appreciate it.”

These instances of usage gratification were usually due to an aversion to unused utility over the object (Bolton & Alba, 2011) where Providers regretted the inefficiencies of their infrequently used items. For instance, with P2P renting, Lynne described her love of “being able to make better use of your things.” Likewise, Jillian liked swapping out her clothes because they would “end up in someone else’s closet and you could kind of breathe new life into it.” Although this was often associated with the need for a redemption value, some said their “gratification” had more to do with usage waste rather than wasted money. Barbara said “someone [showed] a genuine interest” in her things she would often be more likely to just give them away (rather than ask for compensation). Rental Provider Bob said “it strikes this personal cord by putting something out there that I’m not using and getting more utility by its use by having someone else use it.” He continued, “Even though it might wear my thing down, I’d rather have it worn down than just collect dust and be excess.” Likewise swapping Provider Lauren said she “couldn’t bear to throw a book away” knowing “someone out there would love to read it.” Two-way rental user Leigh’s description also exhibited a Sentimentalist gratification:

“I am so much more willing to share things who I think feel like complement or really like appreciate my stuff so if they’re like, ‘oh my god that’s awesome!’ and I’m like, ‘yeah it totally is, you should share it with me!’ and then like the item lives on and gets to like touch more people and then like the story gets carried on [...] and then just to find someone who – it’s useful to them, it’s super rewarding to me.”

Similarly, Corrine as a Sentimentalist explained why she loved swapping:

“My things go to people who really are excited about them instead of like maybe going to a thrift store and nobody will really want it or find it [...] and that makes me really sad.”

Meanwhile, Kelly said she enjoyed being able to “pass some of those [unused] clothes on to someone who might need them versus just sending them to [...] I mean, I’ll take stuff to goodwill or other thrift stores but I guess it’s just not knowing where it’s going.”

Thus, through close-knit community exchanges in swapping, Corrine and Kelly were able to eliminate the mystery of not knowing where their items ended up – a common plight of giving to charity or selling online in a large community like eBay. For example, swapping Provider Natalia explained how she enjoyed hearing “someone say ‘oh I really like this item you sent me’ so you do get some sort of emotional satisfaction” and Sarah felt gratified providing her coat (which she had first received as a hand-me-down from a friend) to someone she knew “would appreciate it,” saying, “I feel like three people have loved this coat and I’m curious to see who will be the next person who’s gonna love this coat.” These instances of frustration in not knowing where items end up after giving to charities (e.g., Badje, 2009; Sargeant, Ford, & West, 2006), show how gratification-seeking Sentimentalists need to “dispossess” themselves of the object by giving it to an appreciative recipient (e.g., Roster, 2001; Lastovicka & Fernandez, 2005).

#### **4.2.2.2.2 Cheap Altruists seeking Gratification in Disposition**

**Cheap Altruists** also felt gratified knowing their things were being enjoyed, but were more motivated to help someone else gain access to a good rather than knowing their possession’s legacy was being extended. This finding is similar to Guillard and Roux (2014) who found resellers in second-hand markets were motivated to help out those less fortunate by offering their belongings to others for a low price. For example, rental Provider Ariel said she felt gratified renting out her clown costume saying, “I felt good because I was helping her and she didn’t really need to buy a costume so it saved her money.” Similarly, rental Provider Barbara discussed renting out her dresses which she received as comps for working at a clothing company:

“I like the idea of being able to share things [...] I don’t even really need to make money off of it, it’s more about helping people who maybe can’t afford to buy a 500-dollar dress, so they can just spend 20 or 50 dollars instead of paying 500 dollars.”

Likewise, two-way rental user Leigh recollected renting out her textbook: “it really helped her out because it’s like a hundred and fifty-dollar book and it hardly seems worth it for like one semester so she got it for like twenty bucks so she really lucked out.” Meanwhile, swapping user Rose also embodied a Cheap Altruist when she explained why she thought swapping was “a really cool concept,” saying, “things we don’t need they go to somebody else who they do need it” and Alicia liked swapping her books because “somebody else [could] get a chance to read it.” Corrine recalled a Taker

who had requested a bookmark from her swapping list but because she didn't have anything worth trading, Corrine decided to just send it to her for free: "I spent the cost of a stamp for that and it made me feel good and it made her happy." Similarly, Joanna said if someone liked her item a whole lot, she "would probably just give it to them." These instances of Cheap Altruism are also pertinent to the "Market Mediation" dimension as examples of positive/generalised reciprocity (discussed in Section 4.6.3).

#### 4.2.2.2.3 Rationalists and Purgers as **Non-Gratification Seekers**

In contrast to gratification-seekers, some Providers were not interested in their object being used (i.e., indicating a **Rationalist** decision-style indicative of object detachment). For example, rental Provider Bob described an indifference to social communities and knowing how his things were being used, saying, "I really just looked at [the website] as an opportunity to make revenue." When I asked swapping Provider Joanna if she was interested in knowing how her stuff was being used and enjoyed or how many times it was swapped, she detachedly replied: "I probably wouldn't be too interested in that, just cuz once it's gone, I know it's not mine anymore. I have no connection to it I guess."

Thus, "**Rationalists**" exhibited characteristics similar to "purgers" (Coulter & Ligas, 2003) who are less likely to attach sentimental meaning to their stuff (Phillips & Sego, 2011). Unlike Sentimentalists and Cheap Altruists who often sought out a personal connection with Takers for a more gratifying possession transfer, purgers (and Rationalists) were often happy to remain ignorant of their object being used. In other words, purging rental Providers didn't care how their things were being enjoyed so long as they were returned in good condition and purging swappers didn't care what the Taker did with their item as long as they completed the exchange by sending the agreed upon swapping item.

This section has looked at how an aversion to unused utility of objects gave swapping and renting Providers gratification through disposition. A continuum of Sentimentalists and Cheap Altruists (*Individual Decision-Making Styles*) was identified to create a discussion around differing Desired and Perceived Realities of swapping and rental Providers. Their gratification can also be seen as a desire for "recognition" (e.g., Godbout & Caille, 1992), where gratitude is given to the Provider of the object, making the Provider feel recognised for helping others; as well as the object itself, thus making the Provider feel their object has been recognised for its value. In the next section, I conclude the "Types of Objects to Provide" dimension by looking at how Providers sought to maintain order over their possessions through good "housekeeping."



### 4.2.2.3 Types of Objects to Provide:

#### Housekeeping of Items



Gregson and Crewe (2003) suggested space saving is often a primary motivation for casting out items and this was supported by renting and swapping respondents. For example, when rental Taker Bailey recollected selling a set of shelves for her parents, she told me the main motivation was to purge, explaining, “It wasn’t about the money, it was just getting it out of the house quickly.” Swapping Providers were mostly concerned with space-saving (discussed in the next section), while rental Providers were more concerned with taking stock of underutilised possessions.

#### 4.2.2.3.1 Space-Saving through Swapping Disposition

Space-saving was an especially prevalent motivation for swapping Providers, as Kelly’s explanation was echoed by many others:

“Usually I’ll post things when I’m like cleaning out my closet or find things that I’ve forgotten about or things that didn’t fit anymore that are still in great condition, then I’ll make a pile in my closet and then whenever I have like five or six things that I can post I’ll start taking pictures and posting them.”

At first this sounded counterintuitive so I asked, why would you choose swapping, which also entails the acquisition of items you will have to store, to save space? A few respondents laughed at themselves and couldn’t think of an answer. For example, after Amanda explained, “I just have so much clutter and my room is very small so I just wanted to get rid of it,” I asked her how swapping let her save space. She replied, “Yea, but maybe stuff I need, or stuff you know, haha at least I save not having to buy it.” However, many respondents echoed Joanna’s explanation, “sometimes what I’ll do is just trade several items for just a couple of items that I really want because you know space limitations kind of hamper that.” Lauren called it her “recycling philosophy,” saying, “recycling books is great, because I’d drown in them if I didn’t.” Meanwhile, Clarissa gave a specific example:

“I traded a dress once, it was a pretty nice sparkle dress and I really wanted something that just wasn’t gonna put much space in my closet and I traded it for

a hair piece and that was much nicer than having a huge dress in my closet that I wasn't going to wear."

Sarah specifically identified herself as a purger saying, "I have a rule, when I go to the in-person swaps I bring back less than I bring to it. It's a rule that I have! So if I bring say four bags of clothing, I'm allowed to bring two. Sometimes I'll slip a little bit into a third, but I try very hard to purge more than take back." This space saving motivation mostly had to do with reducing the clutter of *unused* things rather than reducing the collection of things in general. Swapping user Corrine gave an example, "I don't like having a lot of stuff, like, having clutter around just stresses me out and like having this ring sit around stressed me out because like it's pretty but I don't wear it and it should go to someone who will wear it because I don't know, that's the point of a ring, to be worn!"

#### 4.2.2.3.2 Rental Disposition as a **Process of Dispossession**

As I expected, space-saving was an important motivation for rental *Takers* to rent instead of buy. For example, two-way user Wade said he did not "want to keep [large speakers] in the house because they'd take up too much space," while renter Bailey stressed "it's nice owning stuff, but you've gotta put it somewhere!"

However, when it came to rental *providing*, I assumed space saving would be an irrelevant consideration because temporary disposition implies a consumer still has to store their product after renting it out. However, a few renting respondents *did* mention space saving. For example, rental Provider Anita thought aloud when I asked her why she liked P2P renting:

"You can't just buy everything you want because you run out of space, and then you say what do I do now, I bought this thing I've used it, it's now I don't really want it [...] So you are left with the conundrum with what do you do with it? If you want new things, you have to get rid of the old things, and how do you do that in an ethical manner?"

Her added thoughts on ethics are further discussed in the "Political Consumerism" dimension (Section 4.7), but Anita's question also introduces a common housekeeping assumption that to get something new, we need to dispose of the old.

Many rental respondents said their cognitive dissonance over selling things at a loss often outweighed their need to engage in purging to save space. Thus, some rental Providers exhibited

Resistant Disposition to items they may otherwise have considered for permanent disposal. Past research has said in order for Keepers (i.e., Providers prone to Resistant Disposition; see Section 2.3) to eventually dispose their items, they often need to go through stages of pre-disposition (e.g., Roster, 2001; Lastovicka & Fernandez, 2005). For example, Albinsson and Perera (2009) found consumers may choose to dispose of items in stages in an effort to get used to living without them. A common pre-disposition strategy for Keepers is storage, whereby placing the object out of everyday sight, the Keeper can slowly detach themselves from the object's history (e.g., Cwerner & Metcalfe, 2003; McCracken, 1986; Young, 1991).

Many rental Providers revealed renting out their things could act as a form of housekeeping because they were able to take stock of unused stuff and reduce the typical "purging motivation" to dispose of unused items (because they were able to justify Resistant Disposition by extending the utility of their items through Temporary Disposition). For example, two-way rental user Lynne regretted the wasted utility of her unused things but did not want to give them away through Permanent Disposition:

"I still actually want to keep and have them occasionally. I don't want to necessarily swap them permanently."

Thus, rental Providers were able to liberate themselves from the weight of object's waste, similar to the Lemaitre and de Barnier's (2013) suggestion that the "physical removal of products may also contribute to psychological clearing of the resellers' mind" (Durif et al., 2014, p. 3). Coulter and Ligas (2003, p. 43) suggested consumers who "identify themselves as clean, uncluttered, and organised" are likely to keep stock of their belongings' utility and continually purge themselves of items not being used. Purging is done to "get rid of the clutter" and maintain a simplified life full of cleanliness and order (e.g., Albinsson & Perera, 2009; Dovel & Healy, 1977; Winakor & Martin, 1963).

Thus, with housekeeping, swapping Providers appreciated permanent disposition as a way to save space, while rental Providers used temporary disposition as a way to reduce the dissonance they felt with things sitting idle and "collecting dust."

This concludes the "Types of Objects to provide through permanent and temporary disposition," which has been explained by three main considerations: (1) Value-seeking; (2) Gratification-seeking from an item's legacy and continued use; and (3) Housekeeping of items. Rental Providers were mostly driven by a curiosity to this novel movement to which they thought, "that makes sense, let me try it." Rental Providers mostly emerged when they: wanted extra pocket money, had the time and inclination

to list and care for their items through the exchange process,<sup>91</sup> had duplicate or extra things they didn't need lying around the house, were okay to part with their possessions, had things they used infrequently but did not want to get rid of, wanted to help others gain access to goods, had an aversion to wasted utility of objects, and/or perceived their items as being unbreakable, fairly durable, or not precious. Meanwhile, swapping Providers were mostly influenced to save space through housekeeping, avoid wasteful disposition choices, save money, and pass their things on to people they knew would appreciate them.

Next, I explore the Types of Objects swapping and renting respondents considered suitable to *take* through temporary and permanent acquisition.

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<sup>91</sup> This theme of having time and willingness to put efforts into curating possessions is discussed further in the "Consumer Involvement" dimension under the topic of "Object Curation."

### 4.2.3 Types of Objects to Take *through re-Acquisition*



The types of objects respondents said they had sought to access through online swapping and P2P renting are listed in the **Figure 4.4**. Swapping and rental Takers were mostly motivated to acquire objects for reasons that were pragmatic (“it makes sense”) and hedonic (“it’s fun”). This is similar to previous research which has suggested consumers turn mainly to second-hand consumption for economic or recreational motives (e.g., Brosius et al., 2012; Guiot & Roux, 2010).

**Figure 4.4** Types of Objects Takers desired to Swap and Rent.

#### Swapping Acquisition Objects:

Books, jewellery boxes, jeans, button down shirts, purses, belts, shoes, accessories, body lotions, handbags, lip gloss, makeup stuff, sewing materials, fabric, hot hair tools, nail polishes, games

#### Renting Acquisition Objects:

Shop vacuum, car seat, art supplies, projector, lighting equipment, mannequin, costumes, hair straightener, climbing equipment, business books, boombox, baby bassinet, running stroller, baby car seat, water pressure cleaner, clothing, power drills, bolt caps, machinery, floor sweeping robot, USB drive, golf club carrier, camera, tools, rock climbing harness, car jack, saxophone, bicycles, stereo speakers, leaf blower, camera lens, microwave, specialty tools, cordless vacuum, silent paint remover, scanner, hedge cutter

Swapping Takers often made the decision to acquire items in a swap for *Situational Usage Factors* such as for gift-giving reasons (a cheap way to acquire gifts), one-off usage occasions (such as getting a dress for a party, getting a book to read), upcycling (a cheap way to get materials), and trying out expensive products (such as designer handbags, makeup, and nail polish).

Meanwhile, rental Takers mostly sought temporary access for various *Situational* reasons such as family life cycle changes (e.g., Charlotte sought out baby products for short-term use), one-off projects (e.g., Ariel needed a projector for an art project, Martin needed a DVD camcorder to transfer old video tapes, Earl needed a special tool to fix his bike, Leigh needed a high powered vacuum to clean out her car), entertainment (e.g., Wade needed speakers for a party, Charlotte wanted to read a business book she came across), and travelling (e.g., Wade wanted to avoid the airplane baggage fees for bringing his belongings on a one-week holiday).

In contrast to Providers (Section 4.2.2), when I asked rental Takers how they found P2P renting, they often listed *active* temporary acquisition search occurrences. For example, two-way rental user Leigh told me the person who rented her textbook had “found [her] posting through Google” and two-way rental user Wade recalled using Google “to find a place to rent a shop vac.” Further, after reviewing the P2P renting interviews available on the official CC website<sup>92</sup> I found most P2P renting founders said they had been inspired because of an individual need for temporary *acquisition* (rather than disposition; otherwise they were motivated for external reasons). For example, many CC founders discussed an *acquisition motivation moment* similar to Tim Hyer who recalled training for a triathlon:

“Rather than pay \$600 to ship my bike cross-country, I attempted to rent a race bike at my destination. The process was so painful, I knew it had to be fixed. The week after the race, I wrote the business plan for Rentcycle!” (Anderson, 2011, paragraph 2).

Tim Hyer’s recollection of needing a bike for a race exemplifies a *Situational Factor* (the purpose for accessing a bike was to participate in a race far from home) as well as *Intrinsic Characteristics* causing dissatisfactory *Extrinsic Characteristics* (because a bike is large, it costs a lot of money to ship).

In parallel to Tim Hyer’s explanation, two-way rental user Tara as a key informant told me the story behind her P2P renting website from her co-founder’s<sup>93</sup> point of view:

“In 2007, [P2P renting] wasn’t around at all [...] so [Margaret]<sup>94</sup> the other co-founder, was actually doing a woodworking project and she needed a particular tool to do a particular job [...] and basically she was on the train one day looking at all these sheds going past in the gardens sitting on the train thinking I bet the thing that I need is in one of those sheds. But how the hell do I find it? So she kind of came at it from that direction.”

Applying these examples to Harrell and McConoca’s (1992) distinction between people who dispose systematically or spontaneously, I found rental Takers mostly sought temporary acquisition when they had a specific need, making their *Individual Decision-Making Style* strategy as more often strategic and planned rather than spontaneous. However, some rental Takers had first been excited

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<sup>92</sup> <http://www.collaborativeconsumption.com/category/pioneers/>

<sup>93</sup> Tara explained that her and her co-founder had independently and concurrently been inspired to create a P2P renting website for different reasons. Her co-founder’s reason was “personal” while Tara’s reason was inspired more by “research” and “technological innovation.” Tara’s story is discussed in the “Political Consumerism” dimension.

<sup>94</sup> Pseudonym.

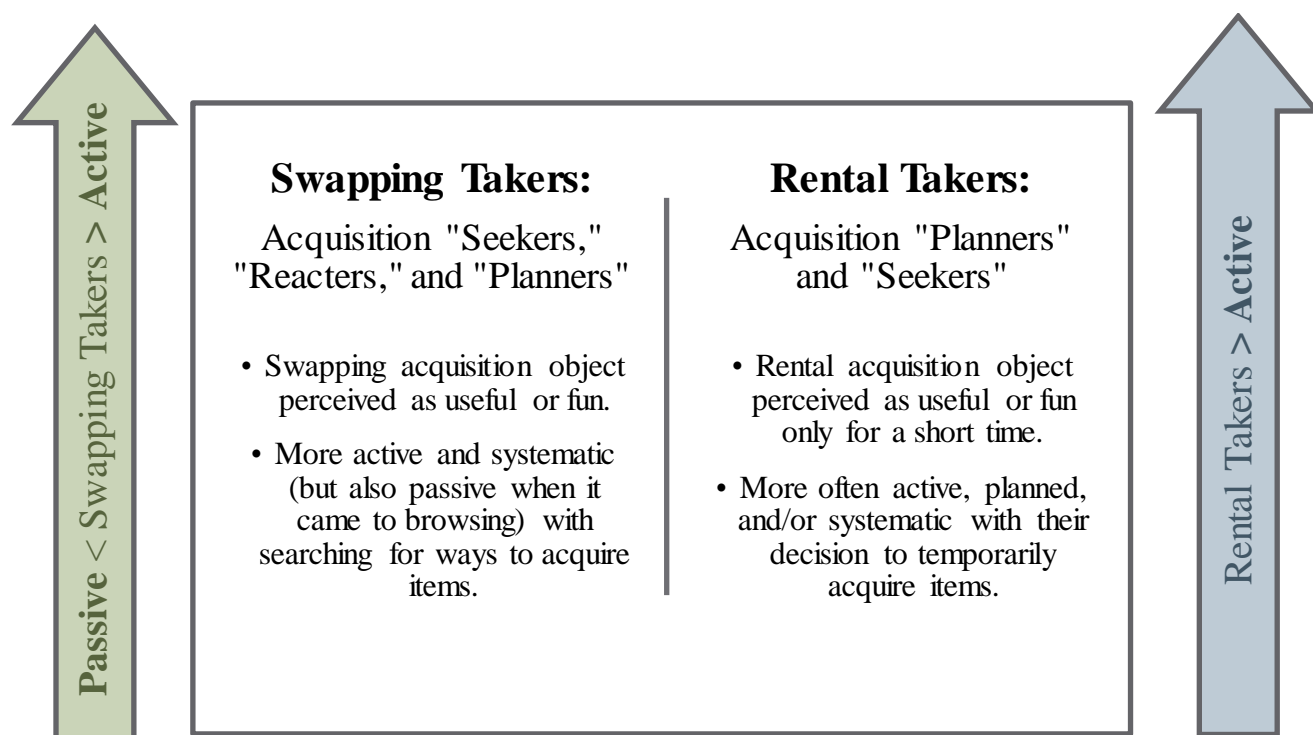
about window shopping for unique objects, thinking they would extemporaneously find uncommon things to try out on a whim. Unfortunately for these would-be-renters, the inventory of objects was often too low to inspire browsing (limiting their search for objects as a quick glance rather than a stimulating recreational activity). More importantly, the objects available for rent were usually functional objects like tools rather than interesting, hedonic or experiential objects. For example, Desired rental Taker Ariel complained most rental items were “just day-to-day items, and there was nothing fancy or different.” Thus, for many would-be rental Takers, this Desired Reality of spontaneous temporary acquisition was often unmet due to the type of items usually being provided. Rental Takers thought temporary acquisition “just made sense” for objects with high idling capacity and that were expensive to acquire, store and/or maintain.

When I asked swapping Takers how they had heard about swapping websites, respondents more often gave instances where they were actively motivated by disposition, but also held a general appreciation for value-seeking in acquisition. For example, Amanda said she “was just basically googling stuff like how to save money” when she found a swapping website. Overall, swapping Takers gave examples of both spontaneous and planned acquisition of objects. Natalia explained how she was more strategic with her swapping saying,

“I usually go on with like a purpose, either there is an item that I want to get or I have a lot of items I’d like to get rid of, so I don’t really casually browse too much, I usually plan.”

Alternatively, many swappers enjoyed high inventories that allowed them to browse for items as an enjoyable way to pass the time and lead to unplanned swaps. Overall, the *Individual Decision-Making Style* inclination for planned (usually for utilitarian purposes) and spontaneous (usually as a result of social or hedonic reasons) swaps were evenly mixed.

These differences between permanent and temporary acquisition by swapping and rental Takers are illustrated in **Figure 4.5**.

**Figure 4.5** Individual Acquisition Decision-Making Style: “Planners,” “Seekers,” and “Reacters.”

The Types of Objects to take through permanent and/or temporary acquisition in swapping and renting exchange were best explained by two main considerations: (1) **Costs of Acquisition** and Usage of items (4.2.3.1); and (2) **Value of Acquisition** and history of items (4.2.3.2).



### 4.2.3.1 Types of Objects to Take: Costs of Acquiring Objects



Second-hand Takers often exhibit the *Individual Decision-Making Style* of value-seeking. For example, research has suggested budget constraints, particularly in lower-income urban neighbourhoods, act as a primary reason for seeking second-hand goods (e.g., Gregson & Crewe, 2003; Hill & Stamey, 1990; Lemire, 2000; Williams & Windebank, 2000). However, consumers who are not monetarily constrained also seek second-hand goods to save a buck, feel proud of getting a bargain (e.g., Bardhi & Arnould, 2005) and be seen as a “clever consumer” (Gregson & Crewe, 2003, p. 11).

Thus, economically motivated decision-making introduces the first consideration for Types of Objects to take in a swap or rental exchange – price consciousness around objects – be it the actual or anticipated costs of acquisition, risks of usage, or disposition. Moore and Taylor (2009, p. 1211) found the process of disposition was often “painful” because people favoured a long horizon of ownership for items which were bought to own (as opposed to temporarily accessed). For this reason, many consumers try to avoid making ownership purchases of objects which lose value in utility in a short window of time (and therefore need to be disposed of before being “used up”).

I discuss this cost consciousness using the following motivational gerunds: **Maximising savings** (4.2.3.1.1), **Reducing cognitive dissonance** over wasted consumption (4.2.3.1.2), **Trialling products** to reduce “buyer’s remorse” (4.2.3.1.3) **Seeking variety** on a budget (4.2.3.1.4), **Reducing wasted residual value** of transient objects (4.2.3.1.5), and **Reducing risks** of using breakable objects (4.2.3.1.6).

#### 4.2.3.1.1 Acquisition Costs of Objects: Maximising Savings

Moeller and Wittkowski (2010) explored consumer preferences for renting and found rental consumers did not appear to be motivated by price consciousness. Contrary to these findings, Lawson (2011) found consumers were motivated by value seeking. Neither of these studies examined actual renting behaviour, only preference for renting. I found many rental Takers to be motivated to maximise their

savings with acquisition, and to do this, rental Takers preferred the rental object to be a costly, high-involvement item. Desired rental Taker Anita explained this preference: “that’s the other problem with consumer goods being so cheap, nobody wants second hand because you can get new things for so cheap!” For example, Desired rental Taker Barbara thought aloud on the idea of renting a vacuum cleaner:

“I’m trying to think like if there were people renting a vacuum cleaner, I mean a vacuum cleaner isn’t THAT expensive, they could just buy one, but maybe if it’s a professional steam cleaner that is thousands of dollars then I could understand it.”

Alternatively, the only monetary costs for engaging in swapping were postage fees. Thus, swapping Takers preferred the swapping products to be relatively small and light weight. Rose gave an example:

“I won’t pass ten dollars and so there’s the box that I have to ship and it’s set at ten dollars to ship and anything more than that that couldn’t fit on that then I wouldn’t swap unless I really wanted the other thing that bad.”

Unlike rental exchange, swapping items that could be cheaply bought first hand were still acceptable as long as the items were not too expensive to ship. Sometimes low cost items were grouped with more expensive items to make the trade more worth the Provider and Takers efforts.

#### 4.2.3.1.2 Acquisition Costs of Objects:

##### **Reducing Cognitive Dissonance over Wasted Consumption**

Rental and swapping Takers motivated by price consciousness often discussed reducing wasteful purchases, as well as mitigating the risk of cognitive dissonance over acquiring objects. Cognitive dissonance refers to the psychological discomfort experienced after a regretted purchase, where consumers are faced with an inconsistency between their beliefs and their actual behaviours (Festinger, 1957). Pierce and Paulos (2011, p. 2392) found “a significant barrier to reacquiring many dispossessed goods is that people perceive them as potentially unreliable, unclean or unsafe and not worth the risk of reacquiring.” Many of my respondents spoke of risks when acquiring second-hand goods compared to new goods. However, they mostly spoke of this distinction under the lens of buying (i.e., with money and for permanent ownership). This is because ownership comes with the responsibility to store, maintain and/or eventually dispose the object.

One risk of acquisition was the uncertainty a Taker was making the right choice and would not regret the exchange. My interview findings suggested swapping and renting acquisition could mitigate the problem of “too much choice,” a commonly known hindrance to traditional *buying* (as opposed to renting or swapping). For instance, many studies suggest mass-customisation and variety can be stressful for consumers (e.g., Huffman & Kahn, 1998). However, the reasons for consumer dissatisfaction around variety seem to be embedded in the burdens of ownership. Too much variety can bring “doubt and regret avoidance mechanisms” because consumers don’t want to have negative dissonance and regret their purchase decisions. Too much variety has been argued to create “stress, frustration, [...] or anticipated/experienced regret caused by heightened expectations and/or an inability to conduct all the valuations and calculations (mathematical or otherwise) necessary to arrive at a choice” (Desmeules, 2002, p. 2).

Renting respondents felt they could avoid these feelings of doubt that tend to come with the finality of a purchase and instead focus on variety as an added benefit to enjoy temporarily. Swapping was also seen as less stressful because Takers could easily re-swap an item if they felt they made the wrong choice. For example, swapping Provider Joanna said:

“It’s a low cost way to kinda try something, maybe, like even in a new style that I wouldn’t necessarily wear without the guilt of spending money on it and a venue to, again, re-post it and re-trade it if it doesn’t work out, you’re not stuck with it.”

Respondents perceived swapping and renting (rather than buying) as a way to reduce the discomfort felt when their expectations were not met. It is a ubiquitously known consumer plight “the things we buy frequently fall short of our (often idealised) expectations, and few things we buy are perfect” so “when purchases do not meet our expectations, we may be prompted to compare what we actually have with our (unrealistic) expectations of what we hoped to have, and these comparisons are likely to diminish our happiness” (Van Boven, 2005, p. 138). Such “counterfactual thinking” (Roese, 1997) is likely to cause cognitive dissonance. However, many respondents (as Takers) discussed how swapping and renting reduced such thoughts because they saw their commitment to ownership as less permanent and could therefore rectify their regret with another exchange. Furthermore, as consumers are often presented with messages to induce a “fading of desire” for their currently owned possessions (Bauman, 2007, p. 21), renters were not faced with the regretted object on a daily basis to remind them of its imperfections.

Research has found the consumption of experiences to be less prone to counterfactual comparisons than material consumption. For example, Van Boven, Roese, and Alvero (2004) compared a restaurant with bad food to a camera with poor quality pictures and found participants were more negatively affected by the camera (as cited in Van Boven, 2005, p. 139). In an attempt to uncover how experiences can lead to less counterfactual comparisons, recent research (e.g., Ariely & Norton, 2009; Caprariello & Reis, 2012) claims it is the *social* aspect of experiences (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) which provides a higher level of happiness (and lower counterfactual thinking) relative to material goods. Although this was not a ubiquitous finding, my respondents did liken swapping and renting to involve more social experiences than other online alternatives (to be further discussed in the “Anonymity” dimension, Section 4.5), so this could be another reason why some users were able to disremember their negative experiences with swapping and renting.

I therefore found swapping and renting transfers to be more fleeting – without a full commitment to own the item, users were able to focus on the item’s instrumental worth rather than be shackled to the object’s material characteristics. In other words, respondents could better achieve happiness by keeping their desires *alive* rather than the traditional consumption attempt to *satisfy* desires with permanent ownership (e.g., Bauman, 2001).

#### 4.2.3.1.3 Acquisition Costs of Objects:

##### **Trialling Products to mitigate “Buyer’s Remorse”**

Another way in which Takers sought to save money and reduce the chance of “buyer’s remorse” (i.e., cognitive dissonance) was through trialling products before purchase. Past research has suggested consumers seek temporary acquisition to seek a trial of products before making high involvement, costly purchases in haste (e.g., Locander & Hermann, 1979; Phipps et al., 2013). This motivation was supported by many rental Takers who described how they sought to trial products before making a high involvement purchase, such as using an iPad to test out its functionality, reading an expensive textbook before deciding if it was worth the shelf space, an avid book lover trialling a Kindle, and discovering what to look for when buying a high powered vacuum. These examples also support Durgee and O’Connor’s (1995) proposition that renting inspires consumer product exploration; Ozanne and Ozanne’s (2011) findings that patrons in toy libraries, “could engage in limited trial of toys to determine if the toys were developmentally appropriate” (p. 270); and Lawson’s (2011) discovery that renting before buying reduced dissonance avoidance for users of car renting schemes. Bob provided

the most extreme example of dissonance avoidance when describing his decision-making process on buying a grill:

“I spend a lot of time shopping, but very little time buying. Like it took me five months to buy a BBQ grill. I think if I lived in a community where most people owned gas BBQ grills and it was portable, on a balcony, then I would continuously rent BBQ grills to see how this one feels and the rest of it, [...] I mean if I had been able to rent these grills, maybe the three or four I had my eye on, I could have more quickly gauged my decision and made a purchase.

“[...] I shopped and shopped and shopped but it’s not the same as giving something a trial run, I really would have appreciated that opportunity if it had presented itself, you know I wasn’t willing to drop 150 or 200 dollars on a portable grill if I wasn’t confident I wouldn’t use it two, three, four, five, six, seven seasons.”

Swapping was also used as a way to trial products. For example, swapping user Natalia gave insight into a community of swappers who exchanged cosmetics:

“People on there tend to always be trying new products. Like if you looked in the forums, people would be really experimental with makeups so that’s kind of why they wanted to swap because it can get really expensive if they want like a forty dollar foundation, people don’t really want to buy those products all the time, so they would swap them a lot.”

Natalia painted a picture where a consumer who was unsure what “staples” or “favourites” to buy could inexpensively try out various brands through swapping. This increased bravery “to try new styles and experiment more” was also found to be a motivating factor in a recent thesis on clothes swapping and clothing libraries (Grimshorn & Jordan, 2015, p. 40).

These product trial examples were most prevalent in respondents who were heavily involved in the product category and/or considered acquisition to be a high-involvement activity due to an *Individual Consumer Decision-Making Style* of risk aversion. For respondents heavily involved in the product category, swapping and renting provided a more economical way to engage in product experimentation because reacquisition and disposition costs were perceived to be lowered.

#### 4.2.3.1.4 Acquisition Costs of Objects:

##### **Seeking Variety on a Budget**

Similar to two-way rental user Lynne who sought “mini-buzzes” from rental acquisition, many respondents said they liked swapping because they could afford to shop more often because the only monetary cost of swapping involved postage fees. Swapping user Natalia gave an example:

“I was just kind of raised in a family of shopaholics I guess so like it’s just kinda like a sport almost haha, so I would say it’s too expensive to do it in the mall so it’s just a way for me to constantly be engaged in something and look forward to getting packages.”

This variety-seeking behaviour supports Moeller and Wittkowski’s (2010) exploration of consumer preferences for renting, which found non-ownership was positively influenced by consumers’ trend orientation.

This was also relevant for swapping respondents, who sought a cheaper way to get new things more often. For example, Natalia explained why she thought swapping was a great way to save money on trying out cosmetics:

“I’m someone who can be very changeable with what I like so it’s a good way to try new things [...] it’s a way to kind of keep up with a lifestyle of constantly wanting to try new things without having to spend tons of money on it.”

Variety-seeking behaviour often centred on a favourite product category. For example, clothing-lover Ariel wanted to rent clothes she could wear clubbing, makeup-lover Natalia used swapping to increase the variety in her usage of different types of makeup, and book-lover users Lauren and Alicia used swapping as a way to get cheaper access to more books. Thus, swapping and renting respondents were similar in their acquisition desire to inexpensively increase their access and exploration of favourite product categories.

#### 4.2.3.1.5 Acquisition Costs of Objects:

### Reducing the Wasted Residual Value of Transient Objects

Bolton and Alba (2011) suggested because consumers are inclined to avoid wasteful purchases of items they would rarely use; they may choose temporary acquisition for items expected to have a high idling capacity. This assertion was supported with many rental Takers, as Bailey put it, “if we only do it very rarely I just can’t see that we can justify owning it.” Likewise, two-way rental user Wade explained his decision to rent had to do with the *Situational Usage Factor* of why and how often<sup>95</sup> the product was being used:

“To me it’s the frequency of use; if it’s something that I’m not going to use that often then I’d rather just rent it. [...] For instance, something simple like a ladder [...] or whatever – I don’t want to buy that! You know, because I’m only going to use it once every few years.”

Similarly, two-way rental user Charlotte recalled searching for a baby seat to rent because she only needed it for six months, saying, “I just thought, ‘well it’d be cheaper for us to rent than to buy.’” Meanwhile Tim thought renting was “a great idea” when he said “there are some things that I just need once and I don’t need to buy.” Thus, rental Takers most often discussed the wasted utility of objects when considering acquisition costs – as non-user Joel put it, “it’s the realisation that I don’t actually need that, I need the service that the good provides rather than the goods itself.”

Rental Takers’ aversion to unused utility often depended on their place of residence. A high urban density which constrained household space increased a consumer’s attention to unused utility, as Bob described his experience living in New York, “living in a really dense urban area with a limited amount of space, I don’t really need my own tennis rackets. I want to play maybe once a year, the fact that there is this opportunity to go and rent something for that one-time use is just really appealing, you know there is this big premium on space here.” This inclination to avoid the responsibility of storing objects (a common burden of ownership; see Berry & Maricle, 1973) has also been found to be a significant motive for consumers to prefer renting in other studies (Lawson, 2011; Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010).

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<sup>95</sup> The relevance of how often an object is accessed is further discussed under the “Temporality” dimension under the subtopic of Frequency of Acquisition.

Although swapping was not specifically associated with products of high or low idling capacity, my interviews often indicated the most popular type of swapping objects were more likely to be consumed and instrumentally used up (thus becoming idle after use) and then reswapped. For example, a book is usually tossed aside once it has been read, costumes are often discarded after only being worn once, and video and board games become forgotten after the player has beaten the game or played it enough times.

Many swapping Providers loved being able to try new products they could reswap after becoming no longer useful; thus mitigating the risk of reselling it for a low redemption value or letting it sit idle and take up space. For example, Natalia liked swapping because she could try different makeup products and nail polish colours without having to commit herself to permanent acquisition; she explained:

“I’m also somebody who kind of gets bored with things after a while and so if I use half the product I can’t really return it, so it’s just kind of sometimes for me if I use an item too much that I can’t return it so I’d be able to swap it.”

Kelly as a swapping moderator similarly recalled seeing girls swapping for ball gowns to wear at high school prom and dances which they would then put back up for swap after wearing. She then gave a personal example of being able to swap and later reswap:

“I did that for my New Year’s Eve dress last year. I swapped for it, wore it for New Year’s and then put it back up for swap after New Year’s because I wasn’t going to wear it again.”

Lauren also perceived swapping as a cyclical activity for consumable objects:

“If I bought a book every time I wanted to read a new book, I’d be in the poor house in no time. So, special books I will buy new, but just general reading, you get it, you read it, and you swap it out if you don’t want to keep it.”

This cyclical disposition and reacquisition of swapping objects suggests swapping ownership crosses into the realm of temporary acquisition, which “can offer all the hedonic pleasure of the first bite, without a commitment to finish eating (and paying for) the rest of the cake” (Chancellor & Lyubormirsky, 2011, p. 135).



#### 4.2.3.1.6 Acquisition Costs of Objects:

##### **Reducing the Risks of Using Breakable Objects**

Hirschl et al. (2003, p. 875) suggested renting as a form of non-ownership reduced the liabilities of “maintenance, repair and disposal,” while Durgee and O’Conner (1995) suggested renting allowed Takers to put wear and tear on rental goods without ownership worries. However, I found rental Takers perceived temporary acquisition from other peers as risky, with many respondents saying they would be or had been extra cautious.<sup>96</sup> Although many rental Takers appreciated not having to deal with future disposal, the burdens of maintenance and repair were more often overshadowed by the burdens of caretaking for the object. This supports Moeller and Wittkowski’s (2010) suggestion that renters may be overly cautious with their rental products to avoid penalties for damage.

Leigh described renting a paint remover: “He was like, rightfully so, ‘just be careful!’ I am hesitant when I’m using people’s items because I don’t want to disappoint them and I don’t want to ruin the item and I certainly don’t want them to keep my deposit.” When I asked Bailey what type of objects she would not consider renting, she replied she wouldn’t want to rent something “super breakable” like “iPads and things like that.” She continued, “I think I’d be less comfortable with that because, if I break it! I’ve gotta do the cost modelling thing with it and see if it’s worth breaking and have it insured for myself in case I accidentally break it and have nothing to show for it at the end.”

This perceived risk of using objects crossed over to swapping as well. For example, Corrine recalled swapping for “a really nice silk expensive designer top” which she eventually reswapped: “I never wore it because it was silk and I was afraid of staining it. It just sat in the closet for like two years.”

Thus, for many swapping and rental Takers, objects most suitable to be acquired were those which were less breakable or risky to use. This concludes my exploration of how “acquisition and usage costs” affected the type of objects users considered suitable to acquire. Swapping and rental Takers both wanted to save money with product exploration, binge on their favourite product category without the higher costs of ownership, and reduce consumption dissonance. Next, I look at how the usage *value* of objects affected the types of objects considered suitable to acquire.

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<sup>96</sup> The reasons for this increased importance of caretaking goods is further discussed in the “Anonymity” dimension.

### 4.2.3.2 Types of Objects to Take:

#### Usage Value of Items



*Intrinsic* and *Extrinsic Characteristics* of objects also had an impact on the acquisition decision. For example, the literature has suggested second-hand goods Providers are most likely to dispose of things which are worn down, broken or no longer serving their originally intended use (e.g., Park, 2010). With temporary disposition, I expected these product characteristics would make the item unsuitable for rental because renting has traditionally been associated with superior quality products (Mont, 2008) or high-priced technology items (Drefes, 1983). However, as previously mentioned, many renting and swapping Providers considered it their duty to only post items in good condition.

This belief became a deterrent to posting items they considered would first need maintenance, upgrades, or tidying up. Many respondents thought it was a waste of time to dispose of non-working or low quality items because they assumed Takers would not want them. However, examples of buying and selling goods in the second-hand world are brimming with stories<sup>97</sup> supporting the adage, “one man’s trash is another man’s treasure.” This axiom that “*everything potentially has value in the right context*” and “perceptions of durability and acceptability are to many extents matters of social and cultural perception” was supported by swapping and rental Takers (see Pierce & Paulos, 2011, p. 2392).

#### 4.2.3.2.1 Finding Value in the “Right Context”

I was surprised when Earl as a rental Taker said he had rented a microwave, because this type of object usually has a lower idling capacity (more commonly used), is slightly heavy (perhaps harder to carry around), and relatively inexpensive (making ownership consumption more economical in the long run). However, he gave a reason of having the right value in the right context: “it was my grandma that needed one, because she forgot you can’t put metal in it so hers broke, so for a week or so I found her a

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<sup>97</sup> For example, consider the supposed origins of eBay, where Pierre Omidyar made his first listing – a broken laser printer provided for sale. Meant to be a test item rather than a serious offer, he was surprised when the item suddenly sold for \$14.83. Upon confirming that the buyer knew the printer was broken, he was even more surprised by the reply: “I’m a collector of broken laser printers.” (Klein, 2010, p. 18).

microwave for like five bucks a week.” Earl perceived renting a microwave as a temporary solution before figuring out who was going to permanently replace his grandmother’s microwave.

Because most objects available to rent were utilitarian, many respondents said as long as the item worked they mostly did not care whether it was of high quality because it wasn’t something they were going to own. For the most part, rental Takers echoed Charlotte, who said as a renter she would be happy to rent more “beat up” items “as long as it’s just sort of superficial stuff that doesn’t affect how it works.” This is similar to Lawson’s (2011) finding that quality has a lower effect on a person’s satisfaction when accessing the object as opposed to owning it.

A commonly salient reason for wanting to engage in temporary acquisition was due to the *Situational Context* of travelling. For example, because a hair straightener is commonly used daily by users and would therefore be more suitable for permanent acquisition, I was at first surprised when rental Taker Bailey said she had tried renting one. However, when this demand was put in the context of travelling its usage value became clear.

Bailey recalled travelling to America and how she chose not to bring her hair straightener from Australia because the plug and voltage would not be compatible, as well as trying to travel light. Although she acknowledged a hair straightener was relatively cheap and convenient to buy, she explained she would have preferred to have rented one instead because she was only going to need it for the short trip so thought owning one was wasteful. Two-way rental user Wade recalled other Situations where he wished to rent an item while travelling (albeit unsuccessfully), such as a car seat and golf clubs. He expanded:

“When you’re travelling you don’t want to have to carry stuff and have to pay for the extra baggage fees and wherever your destination is, if you could just rent that item, that’s another case where I would be totally about renting stuff.”

Similarly, rental Provider Martin rented out his kayak to someone who was in town and wanting to go to the park, while rental Provider Anita rented out her bicycle “to somebody whose sister was coming over from the UK for a little while and wanted to go on a bike run.”

With swapping I similarly found objects always having value in the right context. For example, Corrine recalled swapping old worn out clothing with someone who wanted cheap materials to repurpose and subsequently sell on her online Etsy shop. Clarissa posted a shirt she had stained in the washing machine thinking someone who liked doing crafts such as tie dye may still want it. Clarissa

offered it as a “freebie” item, where she would give it out as extra during a regular swap (someone did eventually request it).

Thus, swapping and renting allowed Takers the option to get lower quality objects which might otherwise have been discarded in the trash or not offered for second-hand acquisition because the efforts to sell these reject castoff items for money were usually more unsuccessful. However, sometimes the open flexibility and low costs to list items for acquisition meant more unacceptable items would leak through the community. For example, Kelly as a swapping moderator<sup>98</sup> (she volunteered) said one of her jobs was to review the items being listed to make sure they met the website’s rules and expectations (e.g., nothing illegal or inappropriate). She gave an example of listed items which had surprised her:

“I’ve seen used underwear, we usually do end up deleting that one, because I think we can all agree that’s kinda gross! It’s not written in the rules, but it’s kind of a collective community decision that for things like that you can’t have – ‘we don’t want that!’”

Thus, from Kelly’s example, I also found some evidence of product contagion affecting the perceived value of objects.

#### 4.2.3.2.2 Considering the value-effect of “Product Contagion”

Because a primary motivation for seeking used goods historically bore out of financial necessity from the “lower tiers of society,” second-hand clothing by association in eighteenth-century England became “a sign of poverty, something unclean and unworthy of polite and civilized society” (Van Damme & Vermoesen, 2009, p. 289). This stigma of used goods can be explained with the theory of product contagion (e.g., Argo, Dahl, & Morales, 2008; Nemeroff & Rozin, 1994), which explains how consumers react to objects being touched and used by others and Takers follow the mantra “once in contact, always in contact” (Rozin & Fallon, 1987, p. 30). Although contagion is more commonly associated with exerting a negative influence (e.g., the gross factor of strangers tainting objects), it can equally have a positive influence on an object’s perceived value (e.g., the sentimental factor of items which have been used by people we like). Although both swapping and renting Providers expressed

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<sup>98</sup> Being a community moderator is also an effort of governance and ritual normalisation which is discussed in the “Consumer Involvement” dimension.

gratification for seeing their things being used (causing feelings of positive contagion), I only observed cases of negative or neutral contagion occurring for Takers.

For example, with P2P renting I found examples of negative contagion for clothing. Two-way user Earl gave his opinion:

“I think it requires a certain mind-set, um, to be, be able to pick up someone else’s clothes and uh, be wanting to put them on, which, I don’t have as much as many reservations about that, but, um, telling people about this company event that we had, and there was a clothing swap, they were, uh, they were a little reluctant to uh, participate or even imagine participating [...] I’m a renter of things and items and tools – I don’t think I could ever rent clothes”

Alternatively, Desired renter Ariel said she wished there were P2P renting websites geared toward clothing rental, showing neutral signs of product contagion. However, when Ariel expressed her desire to rent clothes she usually discussed “fancy dresses” she could wear going out to town. Similarly, Earl said he had rented out his gorilla costume and expressed no concerns someone wearing it would lead to product contagion. Thus, I found clothes which were worn for more special occasions (a costume for Halloween or a dress for partying) were perceived as more suitable to rent and thus Takers would lessen their usual concerns of product contagion. This is similar to the findings of Roux (2010) on second-hand clothing transfers, where “several respondents testif[ied] to the possibility of wearing used clothes under particular conditions, such as a second hand evening dress or suit for a fancy dress ball or a special event” (p. 65). This may be because these items were perceived as being worn less often and/or of higher quality than everyday clothing.

On the other hand, two-way user Wade said because it was being rented between peers rather than through a business, he perceived the contagion as more enhanced and inappropriate to rent, even for special occasions. I found this interesting because objects rented between peers are likely to have been touched by less people than objects rented out by businesses (since P2P renting exchanges occurred sporadically at best). Wade explained:

“I don’t know if I’d rent like clothes from someone else. I know that there’s people who rent the wedding dress; I don’t know if I’d rent a tuxedo from somebody else, I mean, I guess it’s no different when you’re renting from a rental place because I mean who knows how many people have worn it, but yeah I don’t know if I’d do the whole clothes rental thing... I guess it’s stupid

that, ‘hey I’ve done it from a tuxedo place,’ but I wouldn’t do it from somebody else. I don’t know; it just seems different.”

Although I tried asking what made renting between peers different, Wade could not grasp any further justifications. His statement, “I guess it’s stupid” suggested he thought his reasoning was irrational and he wasn’t fully aware of what caused his perceived contagion. Perhaps Wade felt less concerned with renting from businesses because they are known to clean and maintain their rental items. This professional intermediary between users allows Takers to distance themselves from previous users and depersonalises the transferred object. Alternatively renting between peers involved more personal interactions (meeting the object owner) so depersonalisation was more challenging (this idea is also expanded upon in the “Anonymity” dimension, Section 4.5).

Overall, most P2P renting websites did not usually have many clothing objects available (websites allowing all product categories were not as active so the amount of objects being provided was limited and websites which were product specific were typically for tools, outdoor gear, and photography or music equipment). Thus, the Actual Reality of P2P renting websites which I studied did not accommodate Takers who sought to rent clothing from peers. Therefore, this topic was not usually salient to respondents.

As for swapping, I also noticed cases where clothing items became devalued from product contagion. However, this was more often to do with perceived quality rather than a “gross” factor. For example, Rose explained why she usually steered away from swapping for clothes:

“I’m just thinking about that people have already worn it, and I mean even if they washed it, some items that I get are pretty worn down. It’s not like, like-new or lightly worn items.”

Thus, product contagion was a relevant factor for the history of objects affecting perceived value over items.

#### 4.2.3.2.3 Considering the Value of “Workability” and “Service”

Previous research has suggested renting can offer superior tangible and intangible benefits by providing more diversity and higher quality products (Mont, 2008a) and more customised solutions so consumers don’t have to figure out how to make the product “work” (Tukker & Tischner, 2006). Thus

high-involvement, complicated, or expensive products have been argued to be the most appropriate for temporary acquisition. However, because the exchange was taking place between peers rather than with a professional, many instances of getting assistance to “make the product work” were unmet. For example, two-way rental user Leigh recalled renting a vacuum:

“It didn’t come with the instructions [...] I was like, ‘oh I don’t know how to use this, wow!’ So that’s kind of like, an advantage of buying it new, it comes in the box with instructions and meanwhile this guy kind of handed it to me as if I already knew how to use it and I didn’t think at the time to be like, ‘wait how does this work?’”

This reality was supported by rental Provider Ariel who said she didn’t know how to use her gramophone so she wouldn’t be able to help the renter if they had asked so she “just decided to say that it’s not working, but you could still rent it for display purposes or filming or something like that.” Many respondents mentioned the benefits of renting from a business as opposed to a peer when it came to making complicated products workable. For example, Charlotte as a two-way rental user said she’d “like to be able to talk to someone about how it works depending on the item.”

As swapping objects were usually uncomplicated when it came to functionality, issues of figuring out workability were not a relevant topic for my respondents. However, both renting and swapping respondents *did* mention the benefit of being able to get recommendations for similar products. Charlotte as a two-way rental user echoed many swapping respondents who said they liked talking to each other about new books to read:

“It was good to be able to speak to the owner about, I mean why they were interested in business books themselves and what other business books they recommended.”

This social benefit of talking to the object owner is discussed further in the “Anonymity” dimension (Section 4.5).

#### 4.2.3.2.4 Finding Value in the “One of a Kind”

Past research has suggested second-hand acquisition may be motivated by a hedonic search for “unpredictable offerings, visual stimulation and excitement [...] and feelings of affiliation and social interaction” (Guiot & Roux, 2010, p. 384). Swapping Takers were enticed by finding objects they

wouldn't normally have access to through first-hand outlets. This need for uniqueness has often been found to be a reason for seeking goods via non-traditional outlets (e.g., Tepper, 1997) and I found such desires from both swapping and rental respondents.

Many respondents anticipated P2P renting websites would give them an opportunity to try out unique or expensive items they wouldn't normally have the chance or inclination to buy. Lynne spoke of her desire to shop for new things saying, "It does still give you that buzz," suggesting that by fostering a proliferation of 'mini-buzzes,' rentals could be an alternative to buying something to permanently own. Unique experiences were important as well, as Bob professed, "I have friends who I'd do a lot of cooking with and we'd say 'wouldn't it be cool if we could get an ice cream maker and *make ice cream out of bacon.*'"

This idea of being able to get something you cannot find anywhere else was found to be appealing to most rental users – as Anita and Bob mirrored each other's questions: "Where (commercially) can you find a waffle maker or chocolate fountain to rent for five to ten dollars over the weekend?" For example, Charlotte as a two-way rental user explained why she liked CC as opposed to B2C models:

"You find [...] unusual things or stuff that businesses wouldn't normally bother about renting out because there's no margin or there's no real financial return."

Unfortunately for would-be rental Takers, this Desired Reality was more often unmet due to the type of items usually being provided (Actual Reality). For example, Jack lamented over the website not having enough inventory for him to engage in window shopping for things he didn't know he needed or wanted to rent. He criticised that although the front page "showed a bunch of random stuff, it was all garbage" and "it was always the same stuff."

Alternatively, with swapping the Desired Reality of finding unique items was usually met. For example, swapping Taker Sarah boasted about one of her favourite items from swapping: "the dress probably doesn't exist anywhere else except for in my closet and I LOVE that!" Similarly, Corrine said she liked swapping because "you can get something one of a kind that you wouldn't have access to if you weren't a part of this community" and Alicia said it was "a good way to pick up books that you wouldn't normally pick up otherwise." Meanwhile, Clarissa liked that she could acquire clothes that she otherwise would not be able to access, giving an example of trading "with a girl from Brazil for clothes [she] would not have gotten anywhere locally."



#### 4.2.3.2.5 Finding Value through “Gift Giving”

Research suggests consumers sometimes engage in second-hand acquisition as an alternative way to find gifts for others (e.g., Dovel & Healy, 1977; Gregson & Crewe, 2003). Although this was not relevant to renting, I found strong support for this proposition with swapping respondents, as Clarissa put it, “I’m honestly just looking for gifts all the time.” Thus, a popular usage value for swapping was to find items to give away as gifts.

Sometimes this was *Planned and Systematic* for gifting events. For example, swapping user Kelly explained, “around Christmas you’ll see a lot of people asking for certain things like they’ll be trying to swap for Christmas gifts for people.” Sometimes respondents said they would swap for gifts as a way to still engage in swapping without accumulating too many items for themselves. For example, Clarissa explained, “one thing I would do in order to make sure that MY closet had space is I would get a lot of stuff that were intended to be a gift, so even though I was receiving all this stuff, I was only keeping like half of it.”

Swapping for gifts was also *Spontaneous and Reactory*. For example, Sarah explained that when someone asked for something on her list and she didn’t see anything she liked, she would often ask one of her sisters or friends if they liked anything on the requesting Taker’s list of items. Other times swapping became spontaneous was after a swap had already occurred and the Taker was unhappy with the object. For example, Clarissa said before trying to re-swap or sell the item she would first try to find someone “to gift it to.”

Overall, swapping users said they liked searching for gifts which were not only more economical as suggested by the literature:

“This is in many ways an extension of ‘clever shopping’ in which gifting gets constituted as a game that tests participants’ skills through careful selection” (Gregson & Crewe, 2003, p. 179),

But also more fun to find:

“And here too we have a search process which is devoid of the notions of drudge and labour which typify accounts of gift-buying in first-cycle spaces, but

which is, rather, characterized by fun, delight and pleasure” (Gregson & Crewe, 2003, p. 177).

After explaining that it wasn’t always cost-effective to buy everyone gifts, Clarissa said swapping was “a nice way to make sure that I can provide gifts for friends,” giving an example: “I’ll get things like children’s clothes, I have four nieces, and I have a friend that has two daughters so I like to get clothes for all of them.”

Most gift-giving instances were informal or unplanned, with the reasons often being, “just because.” Thus, I found swapping to find gifts was more often akin to cheap altruism and/or “Pragmatic” gifting behaviour characterised as unanticipated and instrumentally used to solve a problem (Ertimur, Munoz, & Hutton, 2015, p. 1999) rather than following traditional expectations and rituals of first-hand or systematic gift giving behaviour.

This concludes the “Type of Transferred Object” dimension (i.e., the “what” referential question). This section has explored how “usage value” affected the type of objects swapping and renting users considered suitable to acquire, which were explained by two main considerations: (1) Acquisition and usage costs; and (2) Usage value. Rental Takers emerged when they: needed something for a one-off project, sought unique experiences, had limited space to own everything they wanted, were travelling, and/or they wanted to engage in product trial before committing to a high involvement purchase. Meanwhile, swapping Takers were mostly motivated to acquire items in a swap for: general bargain seeking, gift-giving, one-off usage occasions, and trying out expensive products.

Next, I explore *how* respondents engaged with renting and swapping through the dimension of “Consumer Involvement.”

## 4.3 Consumer Involvement

After recognising a discrepancy between their Desired and Perceived Realities over objects, respondents attempted to transform their reality (e.g., through disposition/acquisition). This would move them to the Actual Reality layer where they engaged in actions (e.g., to create, use or design). However, no matter how strong users' willingness and intentions were to become involved with swapping or renting, they were also constrained (or enabled) by the websites, other users, past experiences, and their current situation. Consequently, structural and situational influences "such as socially constructed laws, institutions, available technology and public policies" were therefore an important component to look at, because an individual's or a community's "ability to change is materially constrained" (Andreasen, 2002, p. 5).

Thus, I come to another important construct for dimensionalising the field of CC – *how* users engaged in renting and swapping through "Consumer Involvement." This was a predominant theme because the motivations, intentions and actual usage levels of respondents were always contingent upon the actual and perceived efforts to complete an exchange. Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) originally conceptualised this dimension around limited or extensive co-creation, saying traditional rental services like hotels provided full services to users whereas the extensive co-creation involved in car sharing relied on Takers to play various employee-like roles. Using this continuum of limited or extensive co-creation, I broaden the definition of Consumer Involvement to include the commitment, actions, processes, and efforts of Providers and Takers in fulfilling and governing the exchange.

Bardhi and Eckhardt's (2012) dimensions have not come without criticisms and recommended refurbishments. Koppenhafer (2014) argued the term "co-creation" was unsuitable for describing access-based consumption. However, Koppenhafer's reproduced definition that co-creation involves "joint creation of value by the company and the customer" (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 8), *does* fit the characteristics of CC exchange because the website and its users were both creating value in the exchange. For example, websites provided a bridge for communication between strangers and sometimes governance guarantees of satisfaction. Meanwhile, the users provided the website with monetary transaction costs (renting websites had various fee structures and swapping websites offered prime membership benefits to those who paid a one-time fee) as well as the products and services required in each exchange. C2C exchange is a form of co-creation because "customers are not only

served; they are also integrated into the transaction. More specifically, they drive the transaction; they make (as in: build) the business” (Grinnell, 2009, p. 579). Koppenhafer (2014) also said because co-creation was commonly associated with lower monetary costs (e.g., Fitzimmons, 1985), it is not an appropriate term for access-based consumption (such as the case of car sharing studied by Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012). However, my findings suggested costs were perceived to be lower than traditional exchange options for both swapping and renting.

Koppenhafer (2014) also proposed adding a “Governance” dimension to access-based consumptionscapes. However, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) already stated “Consumer Involvement” could “have implications for the nature of *governance*<sup>99</sup> [emphasis added]” (p. 885). Thus, the dimension of “Consumer Involvement” also explains how users needed to get involved with reducing asymmetric risk between users by marketing themselves and making sure other users would not exploit the system.

Finally, Koppenhafer (2014) suggested renaming Bardhi and Eckhardt’s “Consumer Involvement” dimension to “Consumer Participation”<sup>100</sup> because the word “Involvement” was usually associated with levels of involvement in the consumer decision-making process (e.g., Cohen, 1983; Laurent & Kapferer, 1985; Mitchell, 1979). However, I agree with Bardhi and Eckhardt’s (2012) suggestion that “Consumer Involvement” could have implications for “the level of consumer commitment and identification with the accessed object” (p. 885). Consumer involvement has traditionally been partitioned between (1) Enduring involvement – where consumers carry ongoing perceptions of importance and concern over purchasing a product due to emotional attachments; and (2) Situational involvement – where consumers face a temporary concern over purchasing a product because of perceived purchase risks (Bloch & Richins, 1983; Richins & Block, 1986). My interview findings indicated this traditional classification of consumer involvement over objects was relevant to whether or not co-creation was likely to be a successful model. For example, when the type of product was a high involvement product the consumer spent a long time considering in their consumer decision-making process, then the high involvement activities of renting and swapping were more likely to be pursued. Otherwise, there was a mismatch between extensively involved activities being partaken for low involvement products. I therefore found co-creation activities to be the most successful (i.e.,

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<sup>99</sup> In addition, Koppenhafer’s ideas of governance also overlapped into the “Market Mediation” dimension which discusses reciprocity in the exchange – thus fears of opportunism and dishonesty (or negative reciprocity) led to the need for governance mechanisms.

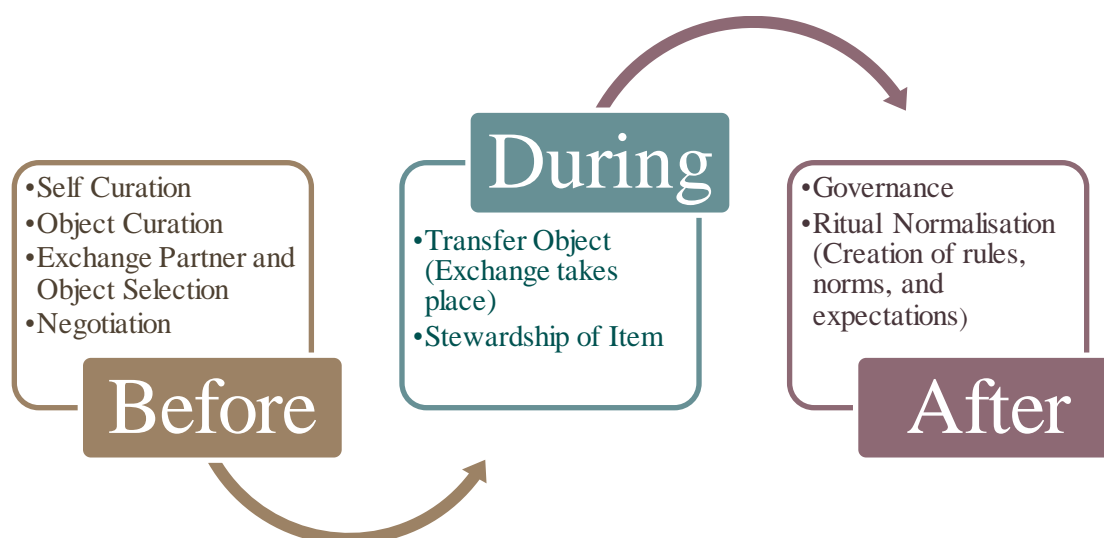
<sup>100</sup> Koppenhafer (2014) used the following definition of consumer participation: “the degree to which the customer is involved in producing and delivering the service” (Dabholkar 1990, p. 484).

showing higher network externalities and higher usage) when consumers were highly involved in the product category (i.e., Enduring involvement) and the websites promoted that product category (e.g., book lovers swapping on book swapping websites, photography enthusiasts renting on camera equipment rental websites). For this reason, I kept the original “Involvement” terminology so it could also explain a continuum of whether the user was committed to the CC activity (i.e., their attachment to the website, other users, the exchange, and the transferred objects) rather than only look at whether or not the website required extra roles of participation to fulfil the exchange.

CC can be characterised as a self-service model of *autonomous* co-creation (e.g., Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Zwass, 2010) where Providers and Takers have to actively collaborate in the realisation of value in an exchange (Lawson, 2011; Young, 2011). According to economic theory, consumers need to conduct various activities to fulfil an exchange “such as searching for information, negotiating terms, and monitoring the on-going process to ensure a favourable deal” (Liang & Huang, 1998, p. 31). The theory of transaction cost economics predicts people prefer more efficient processes requiring the least involvement for their return (Shelanski & Klein, 1995). Although the Internet has lowered “transaction costs of coordinating groups of people with aligned wants and needs” so second-hand exchange can be less tricky, inconvenient, and inefficient, my findings suggest the second-hand world may not always be as “practical, convenient, and worthwhile” as Botsman and Rogers (2010, pp. 126-127) anticipated. I found renting and swapping as both highly involved CC examples, with both Providers and Takers holding extensive responsibilities for co-creation.

As another example of *theoretical inspiration* to my findings, Harvey et al. (2014) suggested technology facilitated CC users through four themes inspired by HCI literature: “the management of identity, partner selection, ritual normalisation, and negotiation of property rights” (p. 1). These terms helped to explain how swapping/renting websites enabled and constrained users, so I used them in my discussion as the following themes: *Self Curation* (e.g., Tussyadiah, 2016), *Object and Partner Selection*, *Negotiation*, and *Ritual Normalisation*. I also added the following themes as discussed by my respondents: *Object Curation*, *Object Transfer*, and *Governance*.

Efforts of “Consumer Involvement” can be organised around three main phases: (1) **Before the exchange** – Desired Providers and Takers needed to engage in self and/or object curation, as well as initiate negotiation of object transfer after selecting a desired object and exchange partner; (2) **During the exchange** – Providers and Takers needed to complete the object transfer as well as maintain stewardship over the transferred item; and (3) **After the exchange** – Providers and Takers were responsible for governing and normalising the exchange (summarised in **Figure 4.6**).

**Figure 4.6** Three Phases of Consumer Involvement for Collaborative Consumption.

Although these efforts of co-creation are listed linearly to show the stages of a transaction, acts of involvement were often cyclically reproduced and/or transformed as users gained more experiences. For example, Sarah as a swapping Provider explained how she became more involved with *Object Curation* (i.e., providing pictures and information about the object) after a negative experience:

“I had swapped something with someone and [...] I didn’t realise that there was a huge stain in the in-seam of the pants and the girl wrote me and she was very upset and I apologised profusely [...] but I felt very bad [...] so I’ve become more careful about searching the clothing to make sure there isn’t any staining or anything like that.”

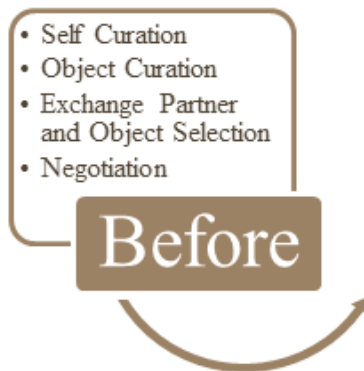
Meanwhile, Amanda echoed multiple swapping Takers when explaining how she became more involved with *Object Selection* and *Negotiation* after too many instances of passive/impulsive negotiation, or as Joanna put it, “swapping for things that you probably don’t need or even want.”

Many rental users transformed their Perceived Reality after realising there weren’t enough users or available objects to rent. This lowered their Actual Reality of *Object Selection* (i.e., browsing on the website). Rental Provider Jack explained, “they just can’t get enough inventory on these sites; people go looking for something and they can’t find it and they never go back to the site again.”

These themes are now discussed in the next sections: Self Curation (4.3.1), Object Curation (4.3.2), Partner/Object Selection and Negotiation (4.3.3), Exchange and Object Stewardship (4.3.4), Governance and Ritual Normalisation (4.3.5), and Flexibility (4.3.6).

### 4.3.1 Consumer Involvement “Before the Exchange”

#### Self Curation



Before an exchange can take place, swapping and renting websites require users to co-create a collection of Providers and Takers. Accordingly, users need to get involved with user curation (i.e., selecting, organising, and presenting content for online use) so the website can become an online community (i.e., a place where people could communicate and find like-minded others). Zwass (2010) suggested virtual communities were “the primary locus of collective contribution to co-creation” (p. 16). Mynatt et al. (1997) defined a community as “a social grouping which exhibits in varying degrees: shared spatial relations, social conventions, a sense of membership and boundaries, and an ongoing rhythm of social interaction” (p. 211). Thus, the first requirement of users typically involves gaining a sense of membership – users have to move from the role of invisible Non-participants to registered Members by signing up to the website and sharing personal information. Websites usually require users to give their email, name, and location as well as requiring them to create a username and password. Beyond the low involvement case of only having a username, some websites allow members to become more involved by offering such things as a personalised profile, address verification, integration of user reviews, and friendship connections. Thus, the involvement of *Self Curation* can foster participation and cooperation in a system, which lead to increased trust and self-governance.

Lynne, as a rental key informant said, “We’re building a community and that is how you build trust and reputation on these sites.” In terms of boosting participation and a “we”-mentality, Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002) suggested “the allure of a virtual community for an individual member derives from the *collectivity*, the positive experience of congregating and communicating in the mediated environment, together, *as a group*” (p. 7). Leigh explained how she saw building community as an imperative foundation for P2P rental functionality:

“I’m a big believer in talking, interacting, communicating. You need to be able to communicate – what are your interests, what are your intentions? And other people need to be able to listen and be able to work with you on that. [...] just being able to openly communicate your ideas and your interests and your needs is like a first step to being able to have [your things] respected.”

Jack suggested websites should have “a big group forum” and “really good communication tools that make sense and [are] easy to use and not hard to integrate into your everyday life.” Thus, users expected each other to “curate” an individual identity for others to interact with and brand themselves as trustworthy by use of feedback and comments, their profile, and the efforts they put forth in their communication and online image. These efforts of *Self Curation* were primarily important for two reasons: fostering community interactions (discussed in the “Anonymity” dimension, Section 4.5) and building trust (discussed in the next sections).

#### **4.3.1.1 Self Curation:**

##### **Co-Producing Confidence to reduce Information Asymmetry**

Building trust was important because CC transactions were initiated between online strangers (where interpersonal “Anonymity” was high). Without an established relationship, users were faced with uncertainties and information asymmetry (e.g., Mishra, Heide, & Cort, 1998; Williamson, 1994), which occurs when a Provider or Taker possesses more information than the other in an exchange. *Self Curation* helps reduce information asymmetry by building information opacity and inducing user confidence.

Anyone can buy a second-hand item online without having to prove to the Provider they are trustworthy. Thus, Self Curation on a second-hand auction website usually falls on Providers, who need to show potential Takers they are trustworthy, reliable (i.e., follow through with the transaction by sending the item on time), and are likely to be describing their item accurately. However, swapping and renting more often came with risks and information asymmetry for *both* Provider and Taker roles. Self Curation was therefore needed to be *coproduced* by both user types as a mechanism for building trust with renting and swapping exchange.

According to Pavlou, Liang, and Xue (2007), these uncertainties can be explained by two factors which are unknown until the transaction transpires: (1) Hidden information, Provider/Taker and transferred object attributes, and (2) Hidden action, Provider/Taker activities in completing the transaction.

With renting, Takers had the usual uncertainties the Provider would give them an item which was not as described (*hidden information*). However, Providers also considered how the Taker was using



their object (*hidden action*) because it could become damaged or lost. Many respondents told me it was rental *Providers* who were faced with the most uncertainties. Earl explained:

“As far as comfort wise, I think it’s definitely one thing to use someone else’s item but to let someone else use your things is – a lot more trust needs to happen.”

For this reason, the involvement and responsibility of *Partner and/or Object Selection* also fell on Providers, not only Takers. Thus, both user types were equally involved in *Self Curation* (i.e., confidence was coproduced).

Lynne as a Desired Taker on Airbnb (a P2P rental site for space which she had tried before engaging in P2P goods renting) said she had to build up a likeable reputation before being accepted by a prospective Provider:

“It was the first time I was using Airbnb so obviously I didn’t have an Airbnb reputation. But what I did put on my profile, was, you know I wrote quite a lot, [...] thinking of what I would want to know about someone else.

“I’d written on there [...] a little bit of my online history, you know, writing my blog for twelve months, that kind of thing. [...]

“[the Provider she was hoping to rent from] did have a quick look at my blog and that kind of thing, you know to sort of see that the various things that I mentioned kind of matched up. I mean they had a quick look, they were kind of funny in that they said ‘oh your profile photo you look pretty honest’ haha.”

Meanwhile, because swapping users were simultaneous Providers and Takers, they usually shared both Provider and Taker risks with each exchange (of both *hidden information* and *hidden action* from a Taker perspective). However, some swapping websites had rules which favoured users with an established reputation. Rose explained:

“Whoever has the least feedback is supposed to ship first, and if I get a tracking number from the other person then I’ll ship my end. But since I’ve been swapping for many years, I have over 100 feedback, so most of the time I get more feedback than the other person, and if it’s the other way around then I’ll ship mine first and then when they got it, they’ll ship their end to me.”

Alternatively, when both users were new (i.e., without any reviews) or if both swapping users had a similar amount of feedback, they both were expected to ship at the same time (making the risk fall on both users).

Overall, swapping respondents were more concerned with issues of trust than rental respondents. This disparity was partially due to swapping being conducted online and therefore anonymous, whereas information asymmetry was lowered when the exchange became finalised in person for P2P renting (discussed further in the “Anonymity” dimension, Section 4.5).

#### **4.3.1.2 Self Curation:**

##### **User Reviews as a System of Reputation**

Previous research has shown C2C commerce websites often rely on user reviews to demonstrate a Provider’s reputation and encourage a Taker’s trust (e.g., Resnick et al., 2000; Yang, Hu, & Zhang, 2007; Zacharia & Maes, 2010). My interviews corroborated reputation systems to be an important factor for selecting an exchange partner and thus an important aspect for participants to manage in curating their profile. For example, Natalia explained how seeing a person’s feedback mitigated her uncertainty over swapping with strangers:

“I was a little sceptical at first so what I would do is I would only swap with people that had very high amounts of feedback, [...] there was a lot of distrust I think with other people that were new like me, just because I didn’t want to take a very big risk, so initially it would only be with people who were very established.”

However, new users were faced with challenges of proving themselves because they lacked this necessary experience. For users crossing over from another type of CC exchange website which they had reviews, having to “start over” and establish their reputation was often discussed with frustration. For this scenario, Wade as a key informant on renting explained the benefits of using a reputation platform: “We’re also looking at companies like Trust Cloud, integrating with them because they’re like aggregating your reputation online.” Unfortunately, this option was not usually available so many respondents were unaware of such platforms. Further, although aggregation websites offered a promising solution to users wanting to switch between websites and show what Botsman and Rogers (2010) called their “Reputation Capital” (p. 218), users without an online presence were especially reliant on *Self Curation* as a pre-exchange effort.

### 4.3.1.3 Self Curation: Address Verification

Some swapping websites offered address verification as a way to confirm a user's identity and as a mechanism of *Self Curation* (at a cost of ten dollars, the website would mail the user an online code used to unlock a "Diamond membership" where a user's profile would then display an image of a diamond).<sup>101</sup>

I thought this sounded like a promising idea because why would someone who is planning to exploit the system pay ten dollars (verification was optional)? Their address would be catalogued in the system so if they "swaplified" (i.e., when a Taker does not ship their item after receiving their requested object) they could no longer use that address or verified account to try and swap again. This would increase their "shadow of the future" (Axelrod, 1984) because by paying for verification they increased the likelihood of future interaction on *that* website with *that* verified username. However, when I asked users how they perceived verified versus unverified users, I found indifference when it came to building trust. For example, Amanda as an address verified swapping user said:

"I'll swap with someone who isn't verified. It's just, basically someone that is not a free rider, and basically I know that the girl that runs that site is paying out of her own pocket and I just thought it was a nice thing to give her the 10 dollars."

When I probed respondents on whether they thought verified users could be considered more trustworthy, I was met with scepticism. For example, Corrine thought aloud:

"I guess, I feel like that can be faked if you have two accounts and you do pretend swaps between yourself, I feel like you would probably get address verified for that so I'm not sure..."

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<sup>101</sup> Description from website: "Becoming a diamond address verified member shows other swappers that you're a dedicated and trustworthy member of the SwapStyle community. Many loyal longstanding SwapStyle members choose to swap exclusively with other diamond members, so you may find that you have better quality swap offers. It is also highly recommended that you verify your address and stick to swapping with other address verified members if you are swapping high end goods." (<http://www.swapstyle.com/diamondmember>)

#### 4.3.1.4 Self Curation:

##### **Building an Online Persona to reduce “Hidden Information”**

By curating their profile with personal information, users were able to increase their credibility by moving past an anonymous username and becoming more “human.” For example, two-way rental user Earl explained how he judged potential exchange partners:

“People can build kind of profiles, and honestly if I can see a picture, if I can see their face, [...] if they give enough information that I can go find them on Facebook or LinkedIn, that’s enough for me. [...] when I can’t find any information on them and they don’t have reviews from other users that had experiences with them, then I’m much more hesitant to do a transaction.”

Earl’s desire to see a photo of prospective exchange partners supports previous research which has suggested trust building requires users to move away from depersonalised identities and humanise themselves (e.g., Wang & Emurian, 2005).

Furthermore, Bente, Baptist, and Leuschner (2012) empirically tested the effect of reputation scores and user photos on perceived trust and actual purchase rates and found evidence of trustworthy photos and positive reputation scores positively influencing a users’ trust and purchase rates. However, they surprisingly found negative reputation scores and untrustworthy photos did not lead to lower trust and purchase rates than users who had no reputation and no photos at all: “missing information, i.e., complete uncertainty for decision making, leads to distrust while moderately negative information leads to neutral trust levels” (p. 8). This was also supported by some of my interviews. For example, two-way user Lynne as a potential Taker said she “didn’t look at any listings where people hadn’t put their personal photos up [...] and if there were no reviews [she] didn’t look at them at all.”

However, Bente et al. (2012, p. 11) used objectively automated reputation scores by the website system based on “primary trust” (i.e., can I trust a person with a bad rating?). This is in contrast to “secondary trust” (i.e., can I trust the bad rating is accurate?) which arises when reputation systems are made up by subjective feedback from users (which is the case for CC exchange). This latter case of secondary trust may help explain why some of my respondents perceived negative reputation scores more acceptable than a complete lack of reputation. For example, many users discussed the risk of getting unfairly rated in a reputation review system causing dishonest reviews, as Amanda explained a general fear of retaliation:

“You give tokens to people like 1 star, 5 star but I’ve noticed that if you tell someone that they did something wrong they’ll come back at you and do twice the damage to you so I know a lot of girls that don’t even like to give neutral tokens because then the other girls will give them a negative token.”

This awareness of users being negatively rated for something which could have been worked out by communication led many users to be weary and cautious with their judgment of user reviews. For example, swapping user Sarah explained her ability to make informed decisions using the information available on other users’ profiles:

“I’ve actually gone to pages that had one or two negative karma and it will say on their profile, ‘let me explain this negative karma, this is the incident, this is the reason why it happened,’ and [the website] also has forums where you can also have a discussion about those sort of things so sometimes I’ll visit the forums to see if I can find out more information about a specific incident and it helps sometimes if you’ve already established a swapping relationship with someone; if they do receive a negative karma, [...] it makes you wonder that that incident may not have been, the person that you generally swapped with, it could have been the other person, the new person, someone who’s not used to the swapping situation.”

Thus, negative reviews could be explained away or mitigated, whereas no reviews or information at all (i.e., high Information Asymmetry) made users wearier with trust.

#### 4.3.1.5 Self Curation:

##### **Attaining Confidence through Knowledge and Experience**

*Self Curation* also involved users educating themselves about the expected roles, requirements and website norms. For example, Sarah explained how she first got involved with swapping:

“If you go through the site there is information about most of your questions you can search out a lot of the information and there’s a lot of answers to those questions, but um, I just took my time, I just tried to figure out you know ‘ok this is what I need to do and this is how it works’ and I asked questions, so I made it a point of making myself knowledgeable beforehand you know if I saw that someone had a lot of positive reviews or karma I would ask them questions you know ‘I’m interested in this, how does this work, how does that work?’ you know you, you basically educate yourself like you would with anything else.”

Because most websites did not require users to sign up to the website to browse the online community, such “lurker” roles were also prevalent. Sarah’s explanation of educating herself as an online swapper is similar to Lee, Chen, and Jiang (2006) who found lurking comparable to vicarious learning, and Rafaeli, Ravid, and Soroka (2004) who argued people would sometimes “lurk” the website to gain familiarity and comfort with community norms before getting involved.

Going a step beyond the role of lurking, a few rental respondents said they needed to gain more experience with the process before they felt ready to become a rental Provider. Thus, I saw a passivity similar to lurking where people would try out the less involved Taker role of renting to become better equipped as a rental Provider.<sup>102</sup> For example, Samuel explained how he wanted to “rent from others first” to be better acquainted with the market. He was concerned as a new user, he needed more experience with the system. This would create expectations and set a precedent for his future transactions. Similarly, Murphy and Liao (2013) found many sellers on eBay had begun as buyers “and then moved to the selling side of it as they became more familiar with the system” (p. 202).

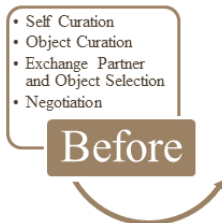
This concludes *Self Curation*, a pre-exchange effort required to construct a community of like-minded Providers and Takers. Many users agreed such efforts were important for building trust and reducing information asymmetry. Curating their identity allowed users to make better connections with each other and increase their comfort in donning Provider/Taker roles by learning the expected norms and processes of swapping/renting exchange. Next, I discuss how users needed to get involved with *Object Curation* before the exchange.

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102 Although the effort of becoming a Taker goes beyond that of Curating content about the Self, I do recall having a similar scenario recently on New Zealand’s C2C online market Trade Me. I was thinking of trying to sell an expensive camera but I had no reputation as a Provider, so I decided to do a few small transactions as a Taker first to gain some feedback. Although I only gained feedback as a “Taker,” I had envisioned this would at least humanise me a bit more than if I had no feedback or experience at all. Indeed, the comments I received showed I was punctual for pickup, quick with communication, and did not waste the Provider’s time. (And I did end up successfully selling my camera).

### 4.3.2 Consumer Involvement “Before the Exchange”

#### Object Curation



After varying levels of *Self Curation*, users also needed to co-create an inventory of objects that were both available (i.e., from Providers) and desired (i.e., by Takers). This requirement of *Object Curation* was perhaps the highest deterrent for CC **Providers**. Lynne echoed many respondents when she remarked that providing (in general) was too much work, giving her experience as a Provider on eBay as an example:

“The hassle of actually going and listing your own items, that hassle factor where you can be quite happy to purchase something off someone else because that actually doesn’t involve you doing anything, you just select the item and have it sent to you, so sometimes, it is time consuming to load stuff onto the site, so you actually really have to want to do it.”

Joel as a Desired rental Provider agreed *Object Curation* required too much initial investment:

“One of the biggest frustrations I had with [the website] was the difficulty in posting stuff online. It’s one of these, ‘while I’m interested, I’m not gonna invest.’ Like we’ve all got these things that we want to do but there is the indexing the initial photos and organizing it into albums or whether scanning all the photos or putting all your books or CDs if you still have them in order, so you just never get round to curating all your stuff.”

At a lesser involved *Object Curation* role than Providers, **Takers** also needed to take stock of their current possessions and decide what types of objects they wanted. Takers therefore had the option to present content about objects they wished to access. For example, swappers often posted a list of items they sought either on their own profile page or on the forums (respondents referred to this as their wish list or ISO – “in search of”). Meanwhile some rental websites offered Desired Takers the chance to post a listing of an object which they wanted to rent on the “Wanted Items” page. However, these efforts were not necessary to complete a transaction, so swapping **Providers** were the most involved.

Murphy and Liao’s (2013) exploration of eBay resellers revealed various online reselling strategies Providers needed to implement, which I found applicable to my data. One pertinent to the topic of *Object Curation* was the “presentation strategy” which included verbally and visually presenting the object.

### 4.3.2.1 Object Curation: Visual and Verbal Presentation Strategies

Visual presentation of objects (i.e., posting photos) was important to respondents, as Earl put it: “In my opinion that’s how transactions happen, you see the photos and you imagine yourself there [...] and if there’s no review of the item, photos are what [you] depend on.” The importance of higher quality photos was confirmed by Shen et al.’s (2009) empirical study on eBay auction sites to have a significant impact on auction success.

However, as introduced in the “Type of Transferred Object” dimension (Section 4.2.3.2), rental Takers were often happy to rent lower quality objects when renting for utilitarian reasons. Thus, many rental respondents had varying perspectives over whether it was always necessary to post a photo of the rental object or if a generic stock photo from the Internet was acceptable – or sometimes even no photo at all. As expected, many respondents still wanted to see a photo of the actual object so they could assess the item’s condition. However, many users also expressed a willingness to give up this certainty as long as the Provider accurately explained the condition in writing. With swapping respondents, I also found photos were not perceived as a crucial component to *Object Curation*. However, this was only when the swapped object was for utilitarian reasons (i.e., reading a book, watching a movie) as opposed to hedonic/aesthetic swaps (e.g., someone wanting a beautiful book to add on a shelf in their library). For example, Alicia explained why she thought it wasn’t necessary to post a picture of books on swapping websites:

“It doesn’t really matter, it’s just the book that you want.... as long as it’s not into pieces.... as long as it’s in average condition or readable...”

In contrast, including photos and details of more hedonic objects like clothing, jewellery, collectables or decorations required higher quality and detailed photos so potential swapping Takers could assess the object’s aesthetic characteristics. Using terminology from the literature (e.g., Klein, 1998), this difference can be explained by two object categorisations: (1) Search goods – those that can be straightforwardly evaluated before a purchase; and (2) Experience goods – those with attributes which prevents quality from being evaluated until materially accessed. Because search goods came with less uncertainties and were usually being sought for instrumental reasons, past research has suggested these types of goods have a better chance of success for being sold online (e.g., Chiang & Dholakia, 2003). This reduced uncertainty for search goods caused many respondents to be less concerned with seeing



photos for experience goods – posting photos of search goods was sometimes perceived as a waste of time.

Verbal presentation was also an important “Presentation Strategy” for curating objects. Amanda as a swapping user resembled most Providers when she explained her inclination to be honest and accurate when describing her goods:

“I put up what I didn’t like about it... because I like to be honest with people, like if, for some reason if I didn’t like something I like to say it because then I don’t have to like have them say I didn’t say something... Like honesty is important.”

For P2P renting, Takers who left feedback about using a rental object were also providing information for future Takers. This was therefore a case where Takers co-created an object’s online curation and presentation to fellow users.

#### 4.3.2.2 Object Curation:

##### **“Tarting Up” Items to be Desirable**

Beyond the “Presentation Strategy” of online postings, Providers also wanted to make sure their items were in good condition and therefore more likely to be requested by Takers. For example, Desired rental Provider Samuel considered the marketability of his things, suggesting he would want to “tart them up” before listing:

“If I’m going to rent a bike, I want to make sure it’s tuned, I don’t want to give somebody a bike and be like ‘oh, by the way, the first seven gears, you know, the derailleur is off, it won’t shift into them,’ or ‘on my truck, the radio display doesn’t work, so I can only listen to one radio station.’ You know, I would want to tart it up, and fix little things like that.”

Similarly, rental Provider Anita said she “hate[d] selling things” because it required “having to get them into top condition.”

As for swapping, no one considered about fixing up their things, however many respondents stressed the importance of taking accurate pictures and trying to make their items look good in the pictures. These perceptions most often occurred because rental Providers preferred the transferred

object to be an expensive item which would yield the highest redemption value, while swapping Providers preferred to list items which would give them the highest exchange leverage for getting their desired item.

### 4.3.2.3 Object Curation: Commitment of Valuation

Another *Object Curation* effort had to do with pricing and valuation of items. To complete a listing, Rental Providers needed to decide on multiple rental prices (i.e., hourly, daily, weekly and/or monthly), a deposit price, and as well as the length of time available for rent and their preferred times for contact and rental drop-off/pickup. Such decisions were often described as overwhelming – especially when the Provider had no experience with the website, or renting in general. Figuring out an appropriate market price for buying and selling was relatively easier – a Google search can reveal numerous websites which show “blue book” market values, and taking a quick look at eBay to see other prices on the same item gives potential Providers value signals so they are better equipped to market their items (e.g., Murphy & Liao, 2013, pp. 212-213). However, rental goods were not quite as saturated in online markets so a few rental respondents said they felt challenged with trying to determine what price was fair and what was too high so Takers would still want to rent from them. For example, Joel, Earl, and Tim as Desired Providers lamented the difficulties in figuring out a suitable rental price.

This market ignorance of valuing access has been alluded to in the literature. For example, Behrendt et al. (2003) found a challenge of usage centred Product Service Systems (i.e., renting) was users having had no prior experiences with this type of consumption. As mentioned under the “Type of Transferred Object” dimension, rental Providers struggled with perceiving their objects as rentable. Earl explained why he thought of himself as more of a rental Taker than a rental Provider when he said, “it’s too much of an imagination leap to think, ‘oh I’ve got all of these things that have value and can be rented,’ it’s more like, ‘oh there’s something I need, hopefully someone has it.’” The efforts of having to value objects prior to a rental exchange seem to have exposed a benefit for swapping Providers: most<sup>103</sup> websites did not require swapping Providers to value their items until the moment of

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103 The exception would be the websites which were point-based (however making a decision to post an item for 1, 2, 3 or 4 points could be argued as less overwhelming than deciding on monetary prices which come with infinite choices). Another exception was when the swapping website offered its users the option to sell their items as well, so some Providers posted their item with a price tag *and* a swap button which gave Takers more flexibility to get the item.

*Negotiation*, so Swapping Providers had less decisions when posting their items (thus mitigating their required involvement).

Having to value items during *Object Curation* points to another distinction between selling things online versus posting things online to give away for free (discussed further in the “Market Mediation” dimension, Section 4.6). For example, Anita as a rental Provider and user of Freecycle said she thought posting things for money took too much effort compared to posting items for free because it had to be done “properly” (this is also relevant to the “Market Mediation” dimension as an example of a Provider perceiving imbalance in an exchange):

“The amount of time it takes to list something properly, you know photographs and uploading it, putting some reasonable thought into a description, all that sort of thing, it just I think ultimately for most things boils down to a waste of time, and I would rather give stuff away or go to a charity shop.”

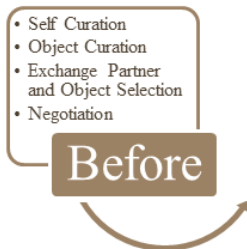
Meanwhile, Charlotte thought being a rental Provider had the *risk* of being a waste of time because she didn’t know the rental market and whether a Taker would want anything she posted for the prices she offered. She explained:

“It’s sort of also the return on investment of time as well, I guess you’re not quite sure what’s gonna get rented out, and do you really want to spend, for me it’s just like, that sort of, I have to weigh in, you know do I want to spend two hours taking photos and writing descriptions about stuff which I’m not sure whether I’ll get two dollars or whatever, is that worth my time?”

This concludes *Object Curation*, the most frequently discussed and salient pre-exchange effort in the eyes of respondents. Next, I look at how users became involved with *Partner/Object Selection* (i.e., through browsing) and *Negotiation* (i.e., of a fair price and convenient time).

### 4.3.3 Consumer Involvement “Before the Exchange”

## Partner/Object Selection and Negotiation



Using the content provided by fellow users, individuals needed to browse through the website for desired objects, make contact with a selected Provider/Taker, and evaluate whether doing an exchange was in their best interest. As introduced in *Object Curation*, it wasn't only Takers browsing the website for desired objects. Sometimes Providers would also look on the website for a desired exchange partner. For example, Clarissa liked having access to swapping users' wish lists:

“The profile also is a very nice interactive aspect of the website, all the other swap sites that I know of [...] have profiles, and what you can put on your profile, you know, ‘this is the kind of stuff I like,’ ‘this is what I’m looking for,’ and ‘this is what I’ll trade with you’ and that’s really helpful because I’ll find five or six things that I like of somebody and [...] I’ll look on their profile and see what they’re looking for, and I might have something that they have listed but I just might not have put it on the website yet, but I’ll just [...] say ‘hey, I have this, do you want it?’ and so that has turned out really well.”

Similarly, with renting, some websites offered Desired rental Takers to create “want ads” for Providers to browse through (thus making them become involved with *Partner Selection* as they searched for wanted objects). However, as I mentioned in the “Type of Transferred Object” dimension (Section 4.2.2), although most respondents said they were more inclined to provide their items, they rarely had the needed cognisance over their objects to make them systematically plan and commit themselves to temporary disposition. Thus, rental Providers tended to be more spontaneous with their choices to engage in temporary disposition.

Such spontaneity meant they were more likely to *react* to direct requests rather than actively search for potential Takers to rent their items. Most Desired rental Providers said they had signed up to the website, posted a few items and then never, or rarely, logged back on unless getting a notification. Unfortunately, many respondents told me the websites did not push these want ads out directly to users so Desired rental Providers still needed to visit the website and actively search through want ads; thus mitigating the spontaneity of disposition. This meant many Taker’s “want ads” often went ignored.

Overall, swapping and renting websites were set up with the usual expectation that *Providers* had to curate their objects and show what was available rather than *Takers* curating lists of items they wanted. Most browsing (leading to Partner/Object Selection) was therefore done by *Takers*.

Many respondents appreciated that *Partner and Object Selection* could be conducted in the comfort of home. For example, swapping user Corrine explained how she preferred browsing online rather than going to a physical place for second-hand acquisition:

“Like, thrifting, is awesome [...] but you have to put a lot of effort into going to the store and touching all the dirty hangers and like trying stuff on and all that stuff, which is fun but it’s just it takes a lot of energy and you need to be in the right mood, but with swapstyle you just like lie in your bed and click through all these different photos of things and then find stuff that you want. So it’s just like a relaxing experience where you might get lucky and stumble upon something really awesome.”

However, there are also challenges with having the exchange being conducted online because the process of *Object/Partner Selection* is more anonymous, making the object’s quality and user’s trustworthiness uncertain (e.g., Haddad, 2011; Jones & Leonard, 2006; Martin & Camarero, 2009). Thus, potential *Takers* (and sometimes *Providers*) had strategies to increase their confidence when it came to making a selection and initiating negotiation. Similarly, *Providers* had strategies to increase their confidence they were making the right choice in transferring their possession. These strategies are now explored, starting with strategies for *Object/Partner Selection*.

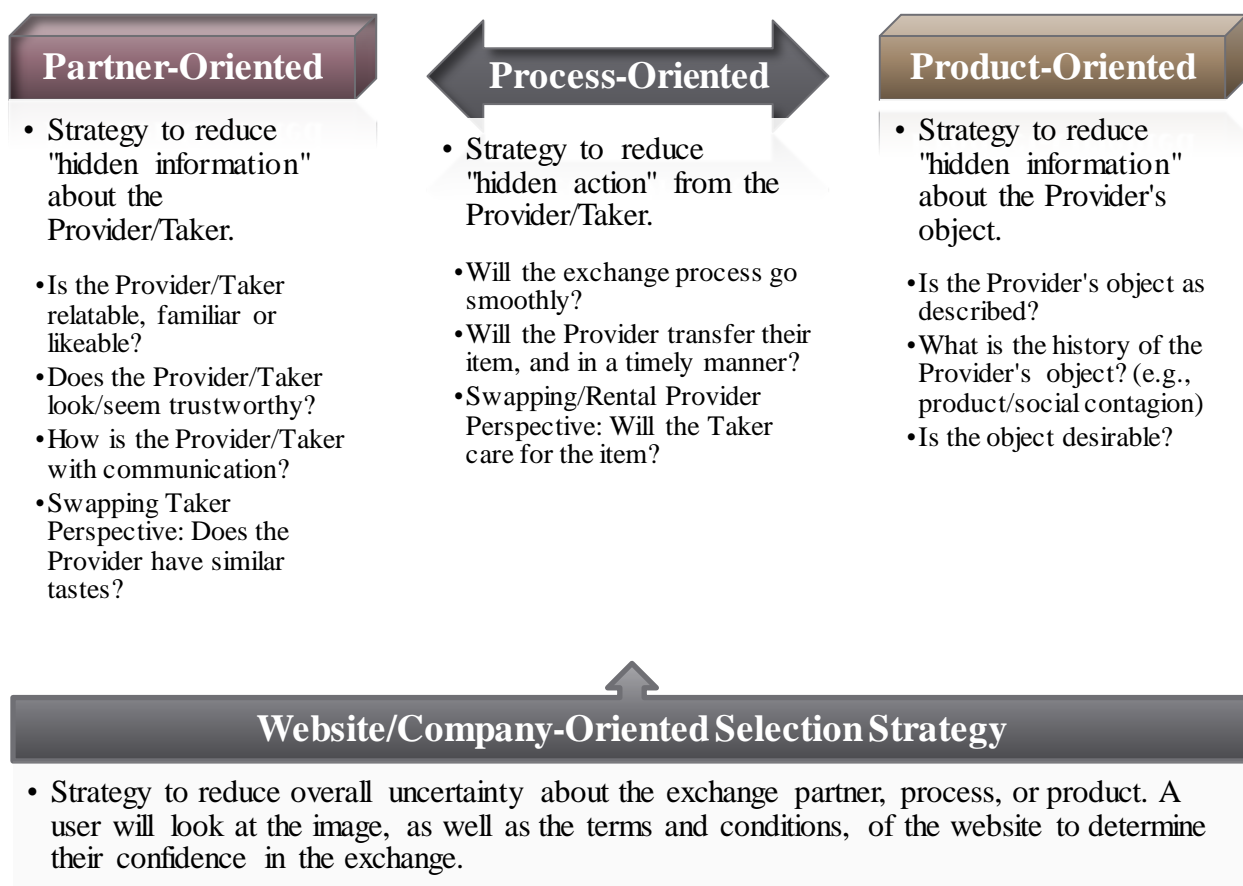
#### 4.3.3.1 Strategies for Object and Partner Selection

Based on my literature review and discussions with respondents, I propose there are three main strategies a swapping/renting user may employ during *Object/Partner Selection* (summarised in **Figure 4.7**): (1) *Partner-Oriented Selection Strategy* – a Provider/Taker considers information about a potential exchange partner (e.g., similarity, friendliness, congruity); (2) *Process-Oriented Selection Strategy* – a Provider/Taker considers aspects about the exchange process (e.g., speed of exchange, commitment of exchange and whether it could fall through); and (3) *Product-Oriented Selection Strategy* – a Taker considers information about the Provider’s object (e.g., quality).

Keymolen (2013) reasoned “the development of *trust online is not just about you and me*, but about you, me and the system that brings us together” (p. 147). Thus, there is also an overarching fourth

strategy, (4) *Website/Company Oriented Selection Strategy*, which judges the exchange (i.e., partner, process, and product) based on the website's characteristics. The partner, process, and website/company-oriented strategies can be employed by Providers and/or Takers, while the product-oriented strategy is employed mainly by Takers. These are not mutually exclusive strategies, but rather show the complex considerations a Provider/Taker can become involved with when choosing a suitable exchange partner and desired object to swap/rent.

**Figure 4.7** Types of *Partner/Object Selection Strategies* and Considerations.



**Product-Oriented** selection strategies were used by Takers seeking information about the Provider's object. Object considerations were often intertwined with the selection of a suitable exchange partner. Usually, this had to do with trusting a Provider's actions (as introduced in Section 4.3.1 on *Self Curation*). However, Takers sometimes used information about the Provider to make judgments about the object's history. For example, swapping user Corrine showed an aversion to negative product contagion when she explained her strategy for selecting "used makeup and body products" based on information from a Provider's *Self Curation*:

“I always check out the person’s profile picture to see if they have acne when I’m trading for like a beauty product because like I don’t know if they have acne I don’t want their used face cream, you know, but like if it has a pump dispenser and it doesn’t get that dirty and they have pretty skin in their profile picture I’m more likely to trade for that with them.”

Previous research has shown people often choose interactions with those they have shared attitudes or characteristics (e.g., Siegrist, Cvetkovich, & Roth, 2000; Turban & Jones, 1988; Uslaner, 2002) and with whom “they can identify with” (Khodyakov, 2007, p. 121). As an example of a **Partner-Oriented** selection strategy, I found evidence of this Provider-Taker congruity (e.g., Cheetham, 2009; Harvey et al., 2015; Price et al., 2000) being sought by Sentimentalist Providers when they were deciding on whether an exchange partner was suitable to take over their cherished possessions. For example, some swappers said they preferred to give certain items only to favourite users because they knew they would take care of it and had a personal connection<sup>104</sup> with them (e.g., Sarah with her coat, discussed in “Type of Transferred Object” dimension, Section 4.2.2.2.1).

Selecting an exchange partner based on congruity could also be for reasons of trust. When I asked respondents how they dealt with trust and what they looked for with choosing an exchange partner, the most common response mirrored swapping user Kelly’s explanation of needing to search a user’s profile and reviews:

“You have to really learn to ask a lot of questions before you accept a swap, and go back and read through their feedback and if everyone says, [...] ‘a lot of the items were not as described’ then you probably shouldn’t do the swap. [...] Then it’s just going with my gut, like if the offer sounds like it’s too good to be true, then it’s like, ‘no, don’t take it, let them go.’”

Similar to Kelly when using her “gut,” a majority of users looked beyond feedback, saying they relied on a “general feeling.” For example, Desired rental Provider Joel gave his appreciation for the exchange needing to be completed in person:

“You meet the person, and you’ve always got the option to back out, like, ‘I don’t know, you’re really dodgy.’”

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<sup>104</sup> This pursuit for interpersonal connections is discussed further in the “Anonymity” dimension.

Rental Provider Ariel similarly thought meeting in person allowed her to “judge” the rental Taker’s “character.” Meanwhile, when I asked rental Provider Barbara how she handled issues of trust, she replied she was “pretty good with intuition,” saying, “If I met someone I didn’t have a good feeling [...] like there were some people who’ve contacted me and I didn’t respond or just said not available because it didn’t feel right.” Similarly, two-way rental user Leigh said she often went “by gut feeling when reading someone’s profile.”

Sometimes this feeling was influenced by the website’s community atmosphere (and thus followed a more **Website-Oriented** selection strategy). Website-Oriented selection strategies often had to do with the website’s look-and-feel and whether it had professional-looking guarantees and conditions. Two-way rental user Earl said he usually put his trust in the website itself, saying “if the website looks legitimate and I am a first time user I’ll trust in that system.”

Further, many renting respondents assumed because the websites were so underdeveloped and “grassroots-esque” that everyone had similar goals and values. Two-way rental user Leigh gave her thoughts:

“When websites like this start, I think there’s like a small user base and everyone in the pool has good intentions and I mean as this website grows it’s going to become more and more of an issue like Craigslist at first was all well-meaning people and now all of a sudden it’s a bunch of scammers and people who are trying to get over on you, and like it’s hard to weed those out but with [this rental website] at this point, I think it’s mainly well-meaning people.”

Alternatively, because swapping websites had a much greater network size (than renting), Kelly said Takers needed to be prepared for all kinds of different users:

“It’s going to be people just like you find in everyday life, [...] people who want to get as much as they can for as little possible [...] really awesome people, [...] people who really like drama...”

Swapping users often employed **Partner-Oriented** selection strategies. This was especially apparent when the product category was specific (i.e., clothing, books, makeup), where I found many swapping respondents were more likely to automatically turn to their favourite exchange partners because they had similar tastes and knew they could be trusted due to firsthand experiences. For example, Alicia said she normally interacted with only one or two people, saying:



“When you’ve done quite a few swaps with someone so you just go ‘oh well I’ll add them to my network’ and then I can just go through and see what they’ve got on their list and see it the other way.”

This is similar to Ye, Viswanathan, and Hann’s (2016) research which found avid users of online swapping websites for books were more likely to utilise reciprocal exchange partners within their existing network to engage in new trades. Alternatively, because P2P renting of goods was more sporadic and one-off, I did not find evidence of users starting to have favourites for their choice in a Provider.

As an example of a **Process-Oriented** selection strategy, rental Taker Samuel explained his concern of non-commitment and whether or not the exchange could fall through. He recalled being a rental Taker on Airbnb:

“A provider might have ten reviews, and two of which might say something like, ‘they cancelled on me’ you know ‘seven days before I was going to show up,’ [...] I know that I’m taking a risk that the Provider has a reputation for cancelling, and in a busy market, [...] I am taking a certain financial risk in that I’ve got a fairly firm plan that I want or need to be there at that time.”

Although Samuel’s example was from his experience with using Airbnb rather than P2P renting of everyday goods, he also said he would be similarly concerned when trying to rent a bicycle for travelling purposes. Similarly, non-commitment has also caused frustration for Takers in timebanks (Shih et al., 2015).

Process-Oriented concerns mostly occurred when the object was needed for a specific situation. Trying to avoid *non-commitment* was also important to Providers, who did not want to waste their time on Takers who had a reputation for “flaking out.” As rental Provider Anita said of her experience, “I’ve had a fair few enquiries that have fallen through; some people arrange to pick stuff up and they never show up which is inconvenient.” Likewise, Martin expressed his annoyance that potential renters may not commit, “if something is not high value or somebody doesn’t seem to be fully committed, there’s a high probability of people flaking out.” Thus, co-creation was important, as without the commitment of both parties, the exchange was not possible.

### 4.3.3.2 Strategies for Negotiation

Overall, swapping was heavily involved with *Partner and Object Selection* because it was inherently tied up in the *Negotiation* (i.e., coordinating value and delivery) of trading an object for an object. Thus, Providers and Takers were equally responsible to show each other what was in demand and what was available to be supplied. For example, consider Sarah's explanation of how swapping could be more spontaneous and reactionary between users:

"Sometimes [...] it's the opportunity for negotiation, you know, I'll have items up and then someone will say 'oh I didn't see anything that you had up' you know, and then I'll ask or they'll have a wish list on their profile and say 'I'm interested in looking for this' and then I'll say 'oh great, let me find you, um, and let me see if I have it' or I'll realise, 'oh you know what, I do have something like that and I haven't worn it in a while, let me exchange it, let me swap it' because I really want their item so much."

With *Negotiation*, many swapping Providers said they needed to be strategic with saying "no" to swap requests. This was mostly due to the interpersonal nature of the exchange (discussed further in the "Anonymity" dimension, Section 4.5), where many swapping respondents said they often felt guilty and pressured to say yes to requests, especially when they were new to the community, because they didn't want to be difficult and ruin relationships that could provide fruitful exchanges in the future. For example, consider Joanna's thoughts on declining requests:

"I feel a little bit bad about it but [...] I try to be as friendly as possible because things can go sour so quickly you know people get offended, [...] if you say 'no I didn't see anything' you are almost insulting their belongings because those are all their things, so, I just try to be as nice as possible, I say 'no thanks, but I appreciate your message.'"

This concludes *Partner/Object Selection* and *Negotiation*. Next, I discuss how users executed the exchange with *Object Transfer* and *Stewardship of the Object*.

### 4.3.4 Consumer Involvement “During the Exchange”

## Object Transfer and Object Stewardship

### During

- Transfer Object (Exchange takes place)
- Stewardship of Item

After *Negotiation*, Providers and Takers were then responsible for completing the exchange. Swapping Providers needed to send their item in the mail to the Taker (higher involvement for Provider) – however renting Providers could either have the rental Taker pick up the item (higher Taker involvement), meet at a central location (shared involvement), or deliver the item directly to the

Taker (higher Provider involvement). Because P2P renting involved a transfer which was only temporary, Providers and Takers had to get involved for both drop-off and pick-up transfers – which sometimes included a “PayPal code” exchange for the deposit and rental fees and checking the item was not damaged before returning the deposit via another “PayPal code.”

Meanwhile, rental Takers had the responsibility of *Object Stewardship*, caretaking the item so it could be returned in the same condition as originally rented. For example, Leigh as a rental Taker explained having to clean out a vacuum cleaner after use:

“I didn’t know if I should return it with all of the stuff that I’ve just vacuumed out of my car still in the thing but I didn’t know how to release it and I didn’t want to break it, but I looked it up online and I figured it out.”

In contrast to Durgee and O’Connor’s (1995) exploration on renting and Bardhi and Eckhardt’s (2012) car sharing study – where both suggested rental Takers would handle their items less carefully because they don’t own the object – most rental Takers I interviewed spoke of being extra careful or just as careful as with their own objects. This is similar to Ozanne and Ozanne (2011) who found parents renting from toy libraries were careful with handling shared toys because of a fear of being punished, as well as Baumeister and Wangenheim (2014) who found a general preference for being extra careful when handling accessed objects (compared to owned objects). Users who engaged in swapping to eventually reswap also discussed the need to care for their items so they could still be in acceptable quality to get what they wanted in future swapping transactions.<sup>105</sup> This concludes the efforts of *Object Transfer*. I now turn to the involvement of *Governance* and *Ritual Normalisation*.

<sup>105</sup> Further reasons for increased care of objects are discussed in the “Anonymity” dimension (Section 4.55). In addition, the duration of object stewardship is discussed further in the “Temporality” dimension (Section 4.44).

### 4.3.5 Consumer Involvement “After the Exchange”

#### Governance and Ritual Normalisation



As users became acquainted with the system, social norms about governance and the exchange process gradually developed as members provided feedback to the website and to each other about their experiences. Thus the *ritual* of swapping and renting started to become embedded into the online community as guiding *norms* for future interaction. These informal norms were in addition to the website's guiding terms and conditions (as a mechanism for governance).

Because renting websites were not being used heavily, user norms were still in the preliminary stage of being built (i.e., interview respondents spoke hypothetically about aspects they wanted). In contrast, swapping websites had an established base of insider guidelines (e.g., who ships first) and a common vernacular (e.g., feedback tokens gave users positive or negative “karma,” someone who didn't send their item was a “swapplifter,” ISO boards showed a desired Taker's list of objects they were “in search of”). Swapping websites were also being used for communicating on forums and discussing products (e.g., enthusiasts for books, fashion, makeup, games), whereas most P2P renting websites either had no forum or the forums were inactive. Open and active forums often bring Internet “trolls” who disrupt community norms (e.g., Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2003) so many swapping websites had volunteers to enforce agreed upon rules and mediate between disparaging users. Thus, moderators upheld community values (e.g., users needed to be truthful, respectful, and relevant to the community). Kelly as a swapping moderator explained further:

"People need to remember, I guess, common courtesy and manners, because, like just because you're on the Internet, it's not just the wild west and you can do whatever you want, you know there are kind of rules and we all kind of have to abide by them to keep things going smoothly."

Swapping forums were also filled with lively discussions of suggested guidelines (e.g., around acceptable objects, who should ship their items first, what to do when a swap was not satisfactory), swaplifting situations (e.g., reporting users), and general swapping advice. Thus, swapping users resembled the eBay model Grinnell (2009) described, where customer behaviour was fused with

employee activity, allowing users “to feel like they have ‘skin in the game’” (p. 578) and become heavily involved in self-governance. Corrine explained:

“I think the members keep people honest because of the feedback [...] people will often list the people who have swaplifted on their profile, like, ‘hey watch out for this person,’ and I think there’s also a list on the forum of people who have swaplifted. So yeah, I don’t think the site has to do much about that because the users get so affronted when they get swaplifted that they really want to do something about it. So, responsibility is kind of up to the users more than the website.”

*Ritual Normalisation* also affected users’ future involvement with curation (e.g., what is an acceptable type and amount of information to share), communicating with potential exchange partners (e.g., being prompt with a response, always responding even if to reject an exchange), completing the exchange (e.g., suitable meeting places and deposits for P2P renting and who ships first for swapping), and how feedback was given out through governance (e.g., resolving negative experiences).

By engaging in *Ritual Normalisation*, many respondents started to feel identification with the website community. Research suggests identification can lead to social participation between members, such as giving out guidance and feedback (e.g., Johnson et al., 2013; Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2007). I observed such identification leading to swapping respondents “helping” other users and adopting “extra-role behaviours” (Keh & Teo, 2001). For example, Sarah echoed a few swappers when she said she often reached out to help new users:

“I think a lot of new people tend to not be clear on what the rules are and what the expectations are and they get a little bit flustered and if there’s someone that’s new to the site oftentimes I reach out to them and give them a kind of, you know guide them through it a little bit.”

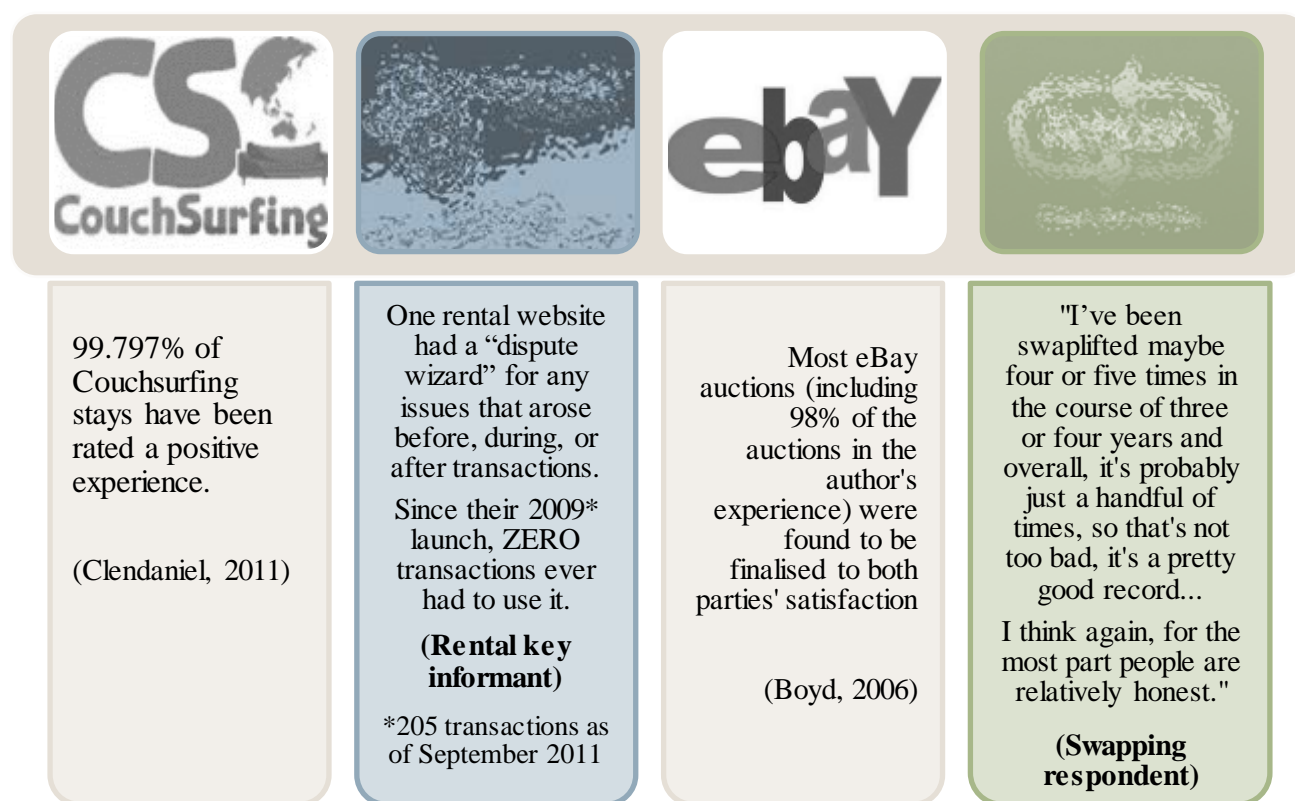
*Ritual Normalisation* was also closely connected to self-governance, because respondents (and websites) differed in their perceptions of what types of governance was needed in the community to create confidence.

#### 4.3.5.1 Co-creation of Confidence through Open Governance

According to Keymolen (2013), website governance can be split into two types: (1) Open, where the community is governed collaboratively between peers through punishments and rewards; and/or (2)

Controlled, where the community is controlled by external governing bodies and rules. Although Botsman and Rogers (2010) spoke of trust as an interpersonal duty governed by rating systems and reputational capital, such “open Internet perspectives” have recently been criticised to be a utopian myth (e.g., Deibert, et al., 2012; Morozov, 2011). For example, eBay became bigger, rating systems and open self-governing were not enough to keep out fraudulent traders so external regulation was required as well (Goldsmith & Wu, 2008). However, Goldsmith and Wu’s study still showed the vast majority of traders on eBay exhibited trustworthiness because of a “robust system of community norms” (p. 139) and my findings supported that community norms were overwhelmingly able to drive perceived trust and success in the commons. For example, see **Figure 4.8** for examples of open self-governing CC communities and their perceived success (swapping and renting websites have been kept anonymous).

**Figure 4.8** A Snapshot of CC Exchange – Was Open Governance Successful?



Looking at **Figure 4.8**, swapping offered more challenges with completing successful trades than any other CC type. Although many rental respondents held fears of self-governance failing, *none* of the P2P renting respondents I interviewed had experienced *or* heard of anyone else being taken advantage of in a P2P goods-rental exchange. Alternatively, nearly all swapping respondents had either

experienced first-hand or heard of other swappers being swaplifted and taken advantage of in a trade. However, I was surprised to find most of these swapping respondents still perceived their overall experiences as successful. This propensity to overlook tragedies of the swapping commons may be because most swapping users became involved with repeat transactions to the same people (compared to P2P renting where a transaction was more often one-off and infrequent). Also, because interactions were more enduring, Corrine mirrored many respondents when she explained her aversion to leaving things on a negative note (in case of future interactions and swaps):

“I gave this girl a negative token at first because she sent me like a broken purse and then she didn’t believe me when I messaged her and I was like ‘this is broken’ and she was like ‘you’re lying’ and um, but then, we kept like messaging back and forth and we changed our negative tokens that we gave each other to positive tokens because we worked through it. [...] I don’t like leaving things on a negative note, and neither of us wanted to do that.”

Thus, although many respondents said they had been swaplifted, been given an item not as described, or not received their item in a reasonable timeframe, most had been able to resolve the issue as a “misunderstanding.” Many swappers also said they weren’t concerned because no money was trading hands so their perception of being cheated was lowered. For example, Natalia said she could “just let it go” when the object she was providing in a swap wasn’t valuable. Some swappers indicated after they had been swapping a long time their risk of being swaplifted was removed because as they were usually a more experienced swapper the other user had to ship their item first. For example, Sarah gave her thoughts on being swaplifted:

“It sucked when it happened the first time, *so you just get a little bit more careful*, and because I’ve been doing it for a long time I have [...] a lot of good feedback so I make a stand and say ‘I won’t ship until I receive your end of the deal’ or unless you have very good feedback as well. So [...] I’ve earned the right to wait [...] and I think it’s fair because my feedback is my stamp of proof of that I’m an honest swapper.”

It therefore seemed like getting swaplifted was a rite of passage you had to get through while gaining experience in judging exchange partners (*Object/Partner Selection*) and building up a good reputation so future swaps could be risk-free, where by then it would all “be worth it.” This concludes the “Consumer Involvement” processes of *Governance* and *Ritual Normalisation*. Next, I summarise how respondents felt about these efforts as well as discuss respondents’ recommendations for increasing flexibility within co-creation.

### 4.3.6 Consumer Involvement: Arguments for Flexibility

Because the websites had various requirements and restrictions for each stage of use, the “Consumer Involvement” dimension also had implications for how much *Flexibility* users were given with co-creation. For example, some websites required users to enter a security code which was sent to their cell phone upon sign up, while others required users to enter at least a paragraph long description about themselves before sign up was complete. These requirements of *Self Curation* could have been potential barriers if the user hadn’t owned a cell phone or hadn’t had their phone near them. Although requirements of *Self Curation* can mitigate unwanted behaviours, they “can also deter people from joining and inhibit contributions to the community, particularly if there are too many rules and people feel stifled by them” (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar, 2003, p. 615). However, some users may also be deterred if they are not given the option for *Self Curation*. Some websites offered tools to build a personal profile and become heavily involved with *Self Curation* - such as telling other users about themselves, listing preferences of objects they wanted to acquire, creating a personal profile with pictures, the option to add or follow users, linking to other social media or second-hand exchange profiles, and forums to build their communal reputation. However, other websites did not offer this flexibility, which left little to no opportunities for social interaction – a deterrent for users who sought community involvement.

For *Object Curation*, some websites required Providers to post a picture of their item (others did not), and some websites required Providers to give extensive information about the item (i.e., through checkboxes of product descriptors to enable complex search functions). Although these extensive requirements for *Object Curation* were preferred by Takers, Providers were occasionally deterred by such high involvement requirements, especially when the object was not considered to be expensive or important. Bailey as a Desired rental Provider gave her thoughts:

“For me my only thing is that you need a photo to list, and sometimes, say I have downtime, you know wherever it could be [...] I think ‘I can list that,’ but I can’t because I have to have a photo to post it. I think that would be my biggest thing with the site, I can understand why they would insist on a photo, but I find that’s a drawback for me.”



A common topic of conversation with renting respondents was trying to get more inventory onto the site. One solution was to give Providers more flexibility with *Object Curation* by lessening the initial commitment required to list an item. Essentially this resolution pointed to decentralisation where users could build an exchange community to their preferred specifications and not be constrained by systems' terms and conditions. Consider Samuel's brainstorm on reducing initial commitment as an example:

"Instead of me just saying I want to rent this thing, what if I had a service where I put my whole household inventory online, [...] so if I'm looking for a waffle iron and it's in this database, and maybe there is some attribute in the database that said 'Item' – waffle iron, 'Use' – rarely. I can go in and say 'okay, is there a rarely used waffle iron in the neighbourhood?' You know, and I'll write to you and I might say 'Yeah I haven't used that waffle iron, you know screw it, I'll just give you the waffle iron, because if I want a waffle iron I'll just eat out! And that could really get people more into swapping and things.'

Leigh suggested such a flexible rental model would require less initial commitment, saying "as of right now listing something requires you to take a picture of it, decide on a price, say something about it [...] it requires a lot out of you even just posting a single item!" Samuel continued Leigh's train of thought, "it would be great because normally you have to opt-in the system, you know? I have to know I have this thing, I have to make some judgements about its marketability and whether or not I wanted to as I said tart it up for use by others." Less initial commitment with *Object Curation* could possibly allow users a chance to rent out their items without needing expertise or market knowledge. As Samuel explained, "It eliminates my second guessing [...] so my perception of marketability of something becomes less relevant as it is just an item that is out there and someone can ring me up and *they* can make that decision as to what they want to offer."

Samuel thought such a system could change the way people looked at their stuff. For instance, someone who was very materialistic and wanted to hold on to their things might be persuaded by a generous offer and end up selling or renting out their items in the end. Jack echoed many users who wanted to have the opportunity to sell, swap, give away, *and* rent stuff when he suggested the site should offer "different conditions on the items," he continued to describe it, "I could check a box that says I'm willing to give this away or check a box that says I'm willing to swap this."

Charlotte also thought it would be better if the website allowed desired Providers to "just put down a list of things that [they had] instead of having to list it down, put descriptions, put a photo, and stuff

like that.” She explained, “like, okay this is my list of things, if you want to know more, sort of click on it and request more information or something,” which then people can have more stuff they can post on, um, really quickly without it taking a lot of time.”

Thus, I found flexibility with the initial commitment of *Object Curation* (e.g., choosing a price/value, choosing a rental period) to be a pervasive deterrent for getting rental Providers involved. Meanwhile, swapping Providers were generally offered more flexibility and less initial commitment with curating their objects (e.g., many respondents said they could put the option to swap *or* sell and they were not required to choose a price/value until *Negotiation* was initiated). Furthermore, some swapping respondents said posting items for swap was generally easier than posting on other second-hand disposition websites. For example, Jillian compared swapping to selling on eBay:

“I think the [swapping website] posting process is a lot quicker than the eBay one and since I came from eBay coming to rehash was really easy cuz eBay asks for a lot more details [...] but with [swapping] it’s just name whatever you have and just size and category and basically you’re done while eBay its name what you have, category, size, shipping, how much shipping time, how much shipping costs, how long to put on auction, do you want an auction or just put a set price, it’s a lot of questions!”

Jillian’s observation of having to decide on an auction time brings up another hassle of posting to C2C auction websites: swapping Providers were not required to decide on a chosen timeframe for posting because their item remained on the site until swapped. Thus, they also did not have to repost their item like on eBay after an unsuccessful exchange attempt. Although this was also the case for P2P renting (items remained on the website for as long as the Provider wanted them there), the requirement of pre-valuing their items still seemed to remain an obstacle to effortless *Object Curation*. However, this flexibility for users to keep their items indefinitely listed on the website until swapped also ended up being a nuisance because the item was “forever not available” when swapping Providers abandoned the website. Lauren echoed many respondents:

“I think there’s a few people who you might want a book from and they haven’t checked in for three months and you can email them, but they don’t respond, so I do think they should disappear after a year or so, because their bloody book’s staying there – it’s annoying! [...] send them an email, where it says ‘it’s been 12 months since you last logged in, if you want to continue, please sign in otherwise we’ll take out your account’ and that would take care of a lot of that.”

Thus, the most favoured solution to this problem was for websites to display more information about users' activity. Alicia explained:

"I think it would be a good idea if it was sort of more dated to see just how many members are on the [website]... so you can go into their profile and see what they've got listed and when the last time that they were on."

*Object Transfer* required some rental users to transfer the rental fee via an escrow service (e.g., PayPal), while other websites allowed the exchange of cash. Most rental respondents belonged to websites which were using some form of escrow services, which held onto the deposits and fees of users until both parties were satisfied, effectively guaranteeing the transaction.

Tara, as a key informant, said the PayPal fees (deposit for Taker and rental fee for Provider) on her website were not released to the users until they had both given feedback (thus requiring users to become involved in governance through building a database of user reputations). Many respondents agreed such *Governance* and *Object Transfer* restrictions were suitable for bigger ticket items as it gave them perceptions of a less risky exchange. This is in contrast to the findings of Pavlou and Gefen's (2004) study on the 'Perceived Effectiveness of Escrow Services,' which they defined as "the extent to which buyers believe that escrows are able to guarantee that their transactions with sellers in a marketplace will be fulfilled in accordance with their expectations" (p. 43). They found perceived effectiveness of escrow services having an effect on a buyer's perceived risk to be *not significant*. However, Leigh showed her confidence for this safety mechanism:

"If someone reserves my item, when they come to pick it up, if I don't like them or they look sketchy to me, then I wouldn't take the code they gave me and I wouldn't give them my item. So then I avoid the transaction, and it's not like they've paid for anything yet, they've just gotten authorisation to pay for it, once they give me the code and I enter it in, then they pay for it, so as long as I don't enter in the code, I don't owe them my stuff."

Earl also experienced confidence from escrow services: "I know that we're paying with PayPal, like the money is going to come through, and so that's definite." Further, Zhang, Lin, and Hu's (2007, p. 139) experimental study supported escrow's promise to "block fraud attempts, reduce traders' losses, and promote more secure online C2C auction markets," thereby mitigating individual 'risk.' However, for the rental of smaller ticket items which weren't perceived to be risky, this high involvement restriction started to become an unnecessary deterrent. Many respondents agreed it would be a better

option to offer the ability to allow cash exchange. Two-way rental user Earl complained of the website's system saying, "sometimes [it] gets in the way, like if I realised 'oh someone else needs this and they're just a friend' then I'm not going to make them jump through the hoops of asking me to rent it through the site, I'll just give it to them." Rental Provider Martin said it was the "multi-step process that after a couple uses [made] it not worth it unless there [was] a decent payoff."

Past research has suggested temporary disposition to be a high involvement activity because it requires more time and effort (Taylor & Todd, 1995a) than alternative disposition activities. Baumeister and Wangenheim (2014) found prospective renters were deterred by the inflexibility, limited access, and high level of participation perceived to come with access-based consumption. My findings corroborated such efforts to be inconvenient by rental Takers, while rental Providers also complained about the arduous task of curating, exchanging, governing, and caretaking rental objects. For instance, Jack expressed his opinion on managing the overall logistical aspects of renting out goods as inferior to permanent disposition:

"Not only posting the picture, but then meeting the person, like if I'm going to Craigslist something, I only have to meet that person and at the end of it I'm walking away with cash, that's why Craigslist works, but this one, it's like I've got to go there, the money's coming through PayPal, I've got to wait for it to transfer, it's freaking ANNOYING, and then I've got to go pick it up at the end, I've got to make sure it's not broken – all that stuff, it's too much to handle."

Meanwhile, offline swapping has also been considered a high involvement activity because it requires a "double coincidence of wants" (Jevons, 1875) from the involved parties. For example, a prospective Provider of a drill who seeks a ladder not only needs to find a Provider with a spare ladder, but one who is also seeking a drill. For this reason, swapping has typically been associated with inefficiency, as finding the needed trader and coming to an agreed upon trade can become difficult. Further, because renting more often requires a higher immediacy and set timeframe (e.g., a Taker needs to rent a bicycle for a specific event occurring during a specific time), coordinating a double coincidence of *time* would also be challenging. For example, the Taker not only needs to find a prospective Provider with a bike, but also one who is willing and available to dispose of it during that exact timeframe.

Many respondents agreed online networks had significantly reduced these inefficiencies – as users were able to make their products and wants available across a greater number of interested parties. However, the effort of browsing and negotiating for a prospective trader was still considered to be a high involvement activity to users who would rather skip ahead to the trade. This is probably why

some CC websites tried to eliminate the involvement of exchange partner and object selection (as well as negotiation) by acting as direct intermediaries. For example, some CC websites allowed users to be extensively involved with negotiation by offering email functions between Providers and Takers, while other websites acted as intermediaries who handled the negotiations. For example, a few bicycle and tool rental websites showed Takers geographically nearby objects and only offered the option to schedule a rental time and date on the Provider's calendar rather than ask questions and contact the Provider directly. Similarly, some swapping websites automatically matched Providers and Takers' wish lists using algorithms. These models eliminated the possibility for negotiation because once a match was found, the websites would only offer the Provider and Taker the option to complete the proffered transfer (i.e., yes or no) rather than allow the Provider and Taker to contact each other directly and change the terms. Swapping user Clarissa gave her thoughts on this model of limited involvement with *Negotiation* and *Partner Selection*:

"You don't usually talk to who you're giving it to, so you kind of lose that personal level, [...] I prefer speaking with the person [...the reason...] there have been plenty of trades that the system has come up with where I just wasn't interested in trading this person's items for what I had [...] and I have denied trades for that reason, not because I didn't want either of them or that kind of thing, just because I think the value wasn't what I wanted them to be. So I would have preferred to talk to the person and try to arrange a similar deal [...] and on [other website she used which allowed more involvement] I can do that."

This concludes the "Consumer Involvement" dimension (i.e., the referential question of "how" users got involved with fulfilling and governing the exchange). Next, I explore *when* respondents engaged with renting and swapping through the dimension of "Temporality," which includes the time period and frequency of exchange.

## 4.4 Temporality

Felson and Spaeth (1978) believed “time” was important for defining CC because “cooperative routine activities require temporal coordination extending beyond the rhythms and tempos of any one individual” (p. 617). Although their definition of CC is completely different from Botsman and Rogers’ (2010), their discussion also applies to the more recently defined CC because peers need to coordinate their time with each other to fulfil an exchange and make decisions about their Desired, Actual, and Perceived levels of “Consumer Involvement.”

Felson and Spaeth introduced three temporal components: (1) Rhythm – the periodicity events occur; (2) Tempo – the number of events per unit of time; and (3) Timing – the coordination of interdependent activities. Bardhi and Eckhardt’s (2012) temporality dimension overlapped with the first two components: (1) Rhythm, which they called “Frequency,” – exchange could either be intermittent and one-off, or longitudinal, ongoing and repeated; and (2) Tempo – “Duration of Access,” – the transaction period and object usage could either be short-term or long-term.

As swapping and renting were conducted through social media communities, rhythm and tempo also applied to other website features (such as social media and browsing capabilities which could be accessed for varying durations). “Temporality” therefore explains the frequency and duration of “Consumer Involvement” (i.e., with self/object curation, partner/object selection, and/or exchange).

I found a third level of temporality which aligned with Felson and Spaeth’s (1978) timing component of coordinating activities: Timing – of Reciprocity<sup>106</sup>, because according to Sahlins (1972) “there are variations too in the time allowed for reciprocation” (p. 193); and of Communication, because with online P2P platforms communication could be either asynchronous (e.g., waiting for an email) or synchronous (e.g., seeing an instant chat). I call this latter component the “Schedule” of Temporality. These levels of Temporality are now discussed in the next three sections.

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<sup>106</sup> Reciprocity is discussed in more detail under the “Market Mediation” dimension (Section 4.66).

### 4.4.1 Rhythm of Temporality: Frequency of Involvement



**How often...** do users log onto the website, post things to dispose, or browse for items to take?

The first component of “Temporality” included the *frequency* of “Consumer Involvement” (i.e., with self/object curation, partner/object selection, and/or exchange), which could either be intermittent or recurrent. Frequency addressed *how often* users were getting involved. For example, a non-user could have no involvement whatsoever, such as a person who signed up to the website but never returned. A non-user could also be heavily involved with visiting the website as a Browser who frequently bookmarks their favourite users/objects, but limit their engagement to Resistant Acquisition and Disposition (i.e., never make an exchange).

Overall, P2P renting respondents engaged in sporadic reactionary involvement whereas swapping users were generally heavily involved with browsing for exchange partners and desired objects. For example, most rental Providers told me after initially listing objects they never revisited the website unless they received an email notification about a request. Many desired rental Takers said they had browsed through the website looking for things to rent but because they found nothing interesting, they never (or rarely) bothered to come back and browse again. Alternatively, most swapping respondents said their involvement was part of a daily or weekly routine.

Traditional CC websites have mostly been characterised by one-off interactions (e.g., Resnick & Zeckhauser, 2002) where the Provider and Taker are unlikely to repeat an exchange with one another. Because rental demand was sporadic, such one-shot interactions were mostly the case for P2P renting respondents as well. However, there *was* the potential for repeat interaction due to the transactions being conducted between people in the same geographical community. This potential was mostly unmet due to the network externalities of P2P renting websites being too low.

Alternatively, with swapping I found evidence of Providers and Takers becoming heavily involved with the community, where frequent swappers would often swap with the same users. Some respondents perceived their frequency of involvement with swapping as potentially shameful and

something they didn't want to admit to doing. For example, one book swapping website showed the number of swaps a user had completed. When I asked Alicia, who had completed over 1000 swaps, about this feature she replied, "Oh, yeah well I don't look at that because uh, it looks like too much if I look at that haha." Meanwhile, Rose perceived her initial swapping involvement as bordering on addiction:

"I have to admit I was really addicted! But every day I would just go in and see if I get any offers and I would go in and see what other people have, I used to be really addicted, I would have two or three trades going on at the same time, between both websites haha."

Within the context of P2P renting, frequency of access was characterised by intermittent transactions, with demand from renters being mostly infrequent and needs-driven. Overall, my findings indicated the intermittency of rental transactions made exchange not worth it to Providers because they had to put in entirely new interpersonal efforts for each transaction, they didn't get enough rental requests, and/or the duration of rentals were too short (requiring them to inconveniently go back out and meet the Taker for pickup right away). Durgee and O'Connor (1995) suggested rental services can become more expensive than traditional ownership in the long run as pay-per-use fees add up overtime. However, because Takers preferred to rent objects on a one-off, short-term basis,<sup>107</sup> long-term rental fees were not a concern for respondents.

Frequency of access for swappers was often more enduring, with many respondents saying they logged in to browse new items every day and were continually taking stock of their belongings as potential swapping objects.

This concludes the rhythm of temporality (*Frequency of Access*). Next, I explain tempo (*Duration of Access*).

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<sup>107</sup> This is further discussed in the "Temporality" dimension (Section 4.44).



## 4.4.2 Tempo of Temporality: Duration of Involvement



**For how long...** do users engage in disposition/acquisition of the object and browse the website?

The second component of “Temporality” included the *duration* of “Consumer Involvement” (i.e., with self/object curation, partner/object selection, and/or object transfer), which could either be short-term or long-term. Duration looks at *how long* users accessed the object and *how much time* they spent browsing for objects and with self/object curation.

P2P renting respondents indicated that the typical duration for renting objects ranged from about three days to three months depending on the “Type of Transferred Object” and their ability to coordinate a mutually convenient drop-off/pick-up time. Kopenhafer (2014) categorised P2P renting as purely transactional (as opposed to relational; i.e., P2P renting was a form of Providing Out rather than “In;” Section 2.3). With this categorisation, Kopenhafer (2014) predicted “the time of usage for the object” would be clearly agreed upon by the Provider, who would expect the item to be “returned promptly when time of access expire[d]” (p. 18).

Although renters *did* coordinate a pre-determined duration of access, the expectation of items being returned right away was not salient to rental respondents and the duration was informally “loose” compared to renting from a business (e.g., where being late to return an item would result in financial penalties). This was mostly because a relationship had started to develop between the rental Provider and Taker, or because the items had high idling capacity anyway (so there was no difference to the Provider if they had it back at home with them or not right away). Thus, it would often not matter if the rental Taker was late (even up to a month according to a few respondents’ experiences) so long as they communicated (i.e., informed the Provider they would be late). Sometimes the rental Provider would not bother making them pay extra fees (a form of generalised reciprocity – discussed further in “Market Mediation” dimension, Section 4.6.3). For example, Bailey explained as a rental Taker:

“I just rented [a power washer] for two days. But [...] by the time you find a mutually convenient time you’re not actually using it that whole time, um, so

you know I may have had it for three or four days and just paid for two days' rental."

Meanwhile Bob as a rental Provider recalled renting out his waffle maker:

"I think she wanted to drop it off at my work but I was really busy, and I didn't charge her for the couple weeks that went by which I guess is how I should have done it, and she got it back to me eventually and everything was in fine shape, it was definitely a good transaction all the way through."

Although Bob said as an afterthought he "should have" charged the Taker extra for returning his item late, he and other respondents mostly preferred to keep things friendly in the exchange. Thus the difficulties of coordinating "timing" between co-dependent users (e.g., Felson & Spaeth, 1978) also affected acceptable lengths of exchange duration. This often had to do with the Type of Transferred Object. For example, Situational Factors may dictate that a rental Taker who is on holiday renting a bicycle *needs* to return it in two days because they are leaving the area (e.g., Samuel who wanted to rent a bicycle while travelling).

Arsel's (2009) exploration of swapping websites via netnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews revealed swapping involvement to be perpetual and "circulating," with consumers re-swapping items to borrow and sample new things rather than own. Thus, the duration of access for swapping was not exactly a "transfer of ownership" because most swappers were swapping to eventually re-swap. Many swapping respondents confirmed such a circulatory duration of access. For example, Sarah explained:

"Sometimes I'll get something and I'll like it for a little while and then I decide that I don't like it or want anymore and then I will swap it again."

Joanna thought swapping was a risk-free way to try new things:

"It's a low cost way to kinda try something, maybe, like even in a new style that I wouldn't necessarily wear without the guilt of spending money on it and a venue to, again, re-post it and re-trade it if it doesn't work out, you're not stuck with it."

Her words, "you're not stuck with it" shows how she perceived ownership as provisional with swapping. Meanwhile Kelly said she sometimes swapped to use something temporarily:

“You just put it back up on the site. Actually it still works pretty well. Like I’ve gotten several things that I’ve swapped for, I think I did that for my New Year’s Eve dress last year, I swapped for it, wore it for New Year’s, and then put it back up for swap after New Year’s because I wasn’t going to wear it again.”

This desire to swap for something and then put it back up for swap was also common with respondents who swapped books – once they had read it, they usually always put it back up for swap. Similarly, Jillian explained she liked to reswap clothing because she got “tired of [her] clothes very easily.”

Many Desired rental Takers also lauded the opportunity to experience unique objects for a short term experience. Trying novel activities was appealing, as Bob professed, “I have friends who I’d do a lot of cooking with and we’d say “wouldn’t it be cool if we could get an ice cream maker and make ice cream out of bacon.”” This idea of being able to temporarily access a unique object was a benefit to many rental Takers, as Anita posed the question: “Where, commercially, can you find a chocolate fountain to rent for five dollars over the weekend?” These findings differ from Moeller and Wittkowski (2010) who found “experience orientation” did not influence preferences for renting.

Although Moore and Taylor’s (2009, p. 1213) study found “with shorter durations, renting is the preferred acquisition mode, while buying is preferred for longer durations, *even when both options entail the same expenditure and provide the same quality*,” rental users in this study indicated a number of concerns with temporary acquisition. These included future resale and rental value, availability of access, and as also discussed in the “Market Mediation” dimension (Section 4.6), the risks of using the rental item. Future resale and rental value relates to the opportunity cost of either buying the item and selling it after use, or buying the item and gaining back the cost through rental fees. For example, Joel lamented the difficulties of mentally calculating the value of borrowing or providing a drill for use, saying it would be “worth buying a \$100 drill if [he] [could] lend it out and make \$5 an hour and recoup the cost over 20 hours.” Availability of access was a benefit of ownership many users preferred not to give up, as Charlotte put it, “it’s just so much easier to buy my own because I know it’s always there at my disposal.” Thus, like sharing in commercial systems, perceived risk of product scarcity played a role in determining renting propensity (Lamberton & Rose, 2012).

This concludes the tempo of temporality. Next, I explore the schedule of temporality which looks at timing of reciprocity and communication.

### 4.4.3 Schedule of Temporality:

## Timing of Communication and Reciprocity



Timing of compensation and communication can be **synchronous** (same time) or **asynchronous** (different time) ...

The third component of “Temporality” included the schedule of involvement, more specifically the *timing* of communication and reciprocity. The literature has categorised communication within social technologies to either be synchronous or asynchronous (Ellis, Gibbs, & Rein, 1991). For the most part swapping and renting websites were offering asynchronous communication between users (e.g., email) as opposed to synchronous (e.g., telephone or instant chat). Such asynchronous communication turned out to be a problem for P2P renting. For example, consider Bailey, as a Desired rental Provider, who recalled a failed attempt at renting out one of her listed objects:

“I had an inquiry but I missed it [...] I would have rented it out but [...] it was just an unrealistic timeframe for me to have checked. [...] So by the time the notification had got to me, when they wanted it, it had already passed. I did get back to them but they didn’t get back to me.”

Although one rental website offered synchronous communication to get around this problem (e.g., they posted the Provider’s telephone number), many respondents were disappointed this website did not also offer email communication. Providers felt uncomfortable publically sharing their phone number, and potential Takers sometimes felt uncomfortable calling a stranger on the phone because they felt like it would be rude to interrupt them (sometimes the phone number provided was a landline rather than cell-phone they could text). Thus, flexibility of involvement was again important to respondents.

Timing could also refer to reciprocity (i.e., when a user expected they would be reimbursed for transferring their object – reciprocity is further discussed in the “Market Mediation” dimension, Section 4.6). Reciprocity could also be synchronous (immediate gratification, compensation is given right away) or asynchronous (compensation is given later on). Reciprocity was synchronous for P2P renting users – a Provider would give the Taker their item, and the Taker would immediately deposit the rental fee in the Provider’s PayPal account or give the Taker cash.

However, like eBay which has been characterised as having time asymmetry (e.g., Chong & Wong, 2005), swapping Takers had to wait for the Provider to reciprocate after sending their transferred object and had uncertainty the Provider wouldn't send their item. Thus, as explained in the "Consumer Involvement" dimension (Section 4.3.4), swapping reciprocation was usually asynchronous (unless both users had the same amount of feedback/experience then they would ship at the same time). For example, with points-based Indirect swapping websites, Providers would send their objects to Takers and receive an online currency which they could later use to redeem on a desired item. With direct swapping websites, the less experienced swapper would send their item first and once the other user had received it then the more experienced user would then send their item as well. Corrine explained the advantage of asynchronous reciprocity to reduce her risk as an experienced swapper:

"I've swapped enough items now that I usually ship second, so I feel pretty lucky to be in that position where I can know that my items are already here before I have to ship out so my risk of being swaplified is really low at this point."

Sometimes swapping users would give/send their item "for free," assuming the person would reciprocate the favour at a later time when they had something they liked. Such long-term orientations (i.e., where Providers and Takers assumed reciprocity would balance out in the long run) usually occurred between users who had a prior swapping relationship and, like sharing, was "characterized by unspecified obligations over an unspecified time frame" (Deckop, Cirka, & Anderson, 2003, p. 103). In other cases, where the users were not personally connected, some users would give their item "for free" with the assumption a different user might do the same in the future (i.e., as a form of paying it forward). This topic of "for free" object transfers is further discussed in the "Market Mediation" dimension (Section 4.6).

This concludes the "Temporality" dimension (i.e., the referential question of "when"). Next, I explore *where*<sup>108</sup> and with *whom*<sup>109</sup> respondents engaged with P2P renting and swapping through the dimension of "Anonymity."

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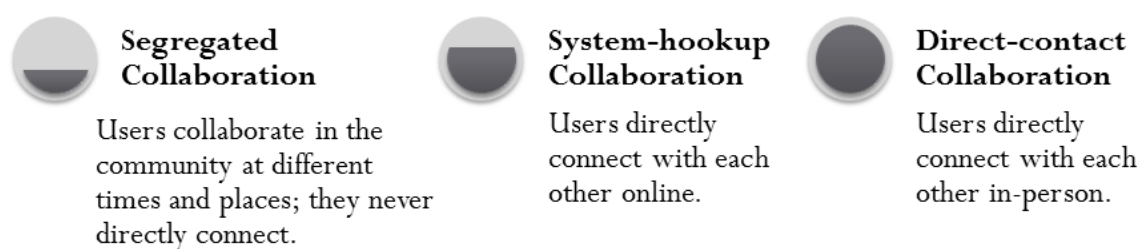
<sup>108</sup> The place or context in which users and objects reside, perform processes and connect to each other.

<sup>109</sup> The roles, social norms, and interactions of people involved in the exchange.

## 4.5 Anonymity

Felson and Spaeth (1978, pp. 622-623) categorised their version of CC into three types of collaboration: (1) Direct-contact collaboration – when users were in direct physical contact with each other; (2) System-hook-up collaboration – when users were directly connected to each other through the telephone (or in the case of renting/swapping when they were connected online); and (3) Segregated collaboration – when people cooperatively consumed a good/service at a different time and place. These are summarised below in **Figure 4.9**.

**Figure 4.9** Three Categories of Collaboration (As introduced by Felson & Spaeth, 1978).





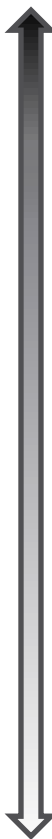




For the most part, “System-hook-up collaboration” was the norm for Direct swapping. However, “Segregated collaboration” sometimes occurred on Indirect swapping websites when the Provider and Taker of an item never directly connected to each other (i.e., usually the website provided the Provider with the requesting Taker’s address and the Provider would send their item; and their collaboration would end). Except for their mailing address, transferred object, and username, these users remained anonymous between each other and other users on the website in terms of time and space. However, some points-based swapping websites gave the Provider and Taker each other’s email addresses (making “System-hook-up collaboration” a possibility). Furthermore, there were occasions the Provider and Taker of a swapping exchange realised they lived near enough to drop off the object in person rather than pay postage fees (resulting in “Direct-contact collaboration”).

With P2P renting, users initially engaged in “System-hook-up collaboration” until the object transfer, where the Provider and Taker had to meet in person through “Direct-contact collaboration.” To the best of my knowledge, all P2P renting websites available at the time of this study followed this mixed model of collaboration. However, B2C renting websites such as Zipcar (studied by Bardhi &

Eckhardt, 2012) typically follow “Segregated collaboration,” where users collaboratively share access to an object but never meet one another or are privy to each other’s usage.

These categories can also be broken down using the two levels of anonymity introduced by Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012): (1) **Spatial Anonymity**, where the stages of exchange are displayed publically or kept private to those communicating with one another; and (2) **Interpersonal Anonymity**, where the interaction between users could be anonymous, digital, or in-person. The first level mostly explains *where* CC involvement took place and the latter level explains whether or not the users knew *who* they were collaborating with; these levels are summarised with examples in **Table 4.3**. These levels of anonymity may also affect each other – for example, a person may be more impacted by spatial privacy when they are around people they personally know as opposed to around strangers.

**Table 4.3** Two Levels of Anonymity introduced by Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012).

		 Spatial	 Interpersonal
 High Anonymity (Private)	 Object history and usage are kept private between the Provider-Taker and from other users in the community.  Involvement occurs without the presence of others.	 Provider and Taker hide behind a username/avatar.  Provider and Taker do not personally get to know each other or receive information about the other person.	
	 Reviews between Providers/Takers are displayed publicly on the users' profiles.  Objects listed by Providers are publically displayed on the website for others to see.  Involvement occurs in the presence of others.	 Provider and Taker make eye contact and/or meet in person.  Provider and/or Taker have a thorough online presence with pictures, social media integration, address and phone number, etc.	

Bardhi and Eckhardt's (2012) levels of anonymity can also be applied to Felson and Spaeth's (1978) three categories of collaboration:



“Segregated collaboration” is likely to have a high level of private *Interpersonal Anonymity* because users never directly connect to each other. However, it is also possible *Spatial Anonymity* could become public if usage history is displayed online for other users to see (such as through user reviews, comments, or pictures).



“System-hook-up collaboration” is also likely to have private *Interpersonal Anonymity* because people are able to hide behind their computer screen and not disclose personal information. However, with *Self Curation* (a stage of “Consumer Involvement”), *Interpersonal* privacy lowers. *Spatial Anonymity* would again depend on whether the history of involvement is publically displayed to other users.



“Direct-contact collaboration” is likely to have the most public levels of *Spatial* and *Interpersonal Anonymity* because users are meeting together face-to-face.

These were frequent considerations for swapping and renting users' Perceived, Desired and Actual levels of “Consumer Involvement” and “Type of Transferred Objects” and are discussed in the next sections: **Spatial Anonymity** (4.5.1) and **Interpersonal Anonymity** (4.5.2).



### 4.5.1 Spatial Anonymity (i.e., Where?)



The first level of anonymity explains whether consumer involvement is kept private or public (i.e., *where* is information displayed?). *Spatial Anonymity* can be considered as a type of situational influence (Belk, 1975) where the CC experience can either have the presence of others or lack of others. This level of anonymity looks merely at whether or not other people could observe or become privy to each other's consumption and is therefore cognisant of a “*non-interactive* social situation” (Argo, Dahl, Manchanda, 2005, p. 207) as opposed to an interactive social situation (which is covered in the next section on *Interpersonal Anonymity*).

*Spatial Anonymity* can be explained by Social Presence Theory (e.g., Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976) which considers a person's awareness of the presence of others; and Social Impact Theory (Latane, 1981, p. 344), which suggests people are influenced by three social forces: (1) Strength – the importance of nearby others; (2) Immediacy – how close people are in space or time; and (3) Number – how many others are present.

The spatial distance between items and **renting** users can be both private (the rental Taker temporality takes the object away from the Provider's eyes) and public (many renters post pictures or reviews after using the item, the Provider is able to see any damage or wear and tear caused by the rental Taker, and the Provider is sharing their private possessions with the Taker).

Although rental Takers are able to take the object away from the Provider's eyes and privately use the object, the Provider has access to the object after the rental period because he/she can make an assessment about how the Taker used the object by evaluating the returned object's condition.

Actual object *usage* is usually private unless the rental Taker posts photos/videos to the rental website or their own social media page. For example, Martin considered renting out his kayak:

“I could see even people who rented, you know being able to sort of upload a photo of them with the kayak, it could be interesting, sort of like, a scrapbook of, history of the kayak... I think it would be pretty cool, I could see it backfiring too if uh, you know if someone posts a photo of them riding the kayak behind a car down the freeway or something, abusing your stuff.”

Although Martin would be able to assess the kayak's damage after the object was transferred back to him, he would not know *why/how* the damage occurred because the Taker used the kayak privately.

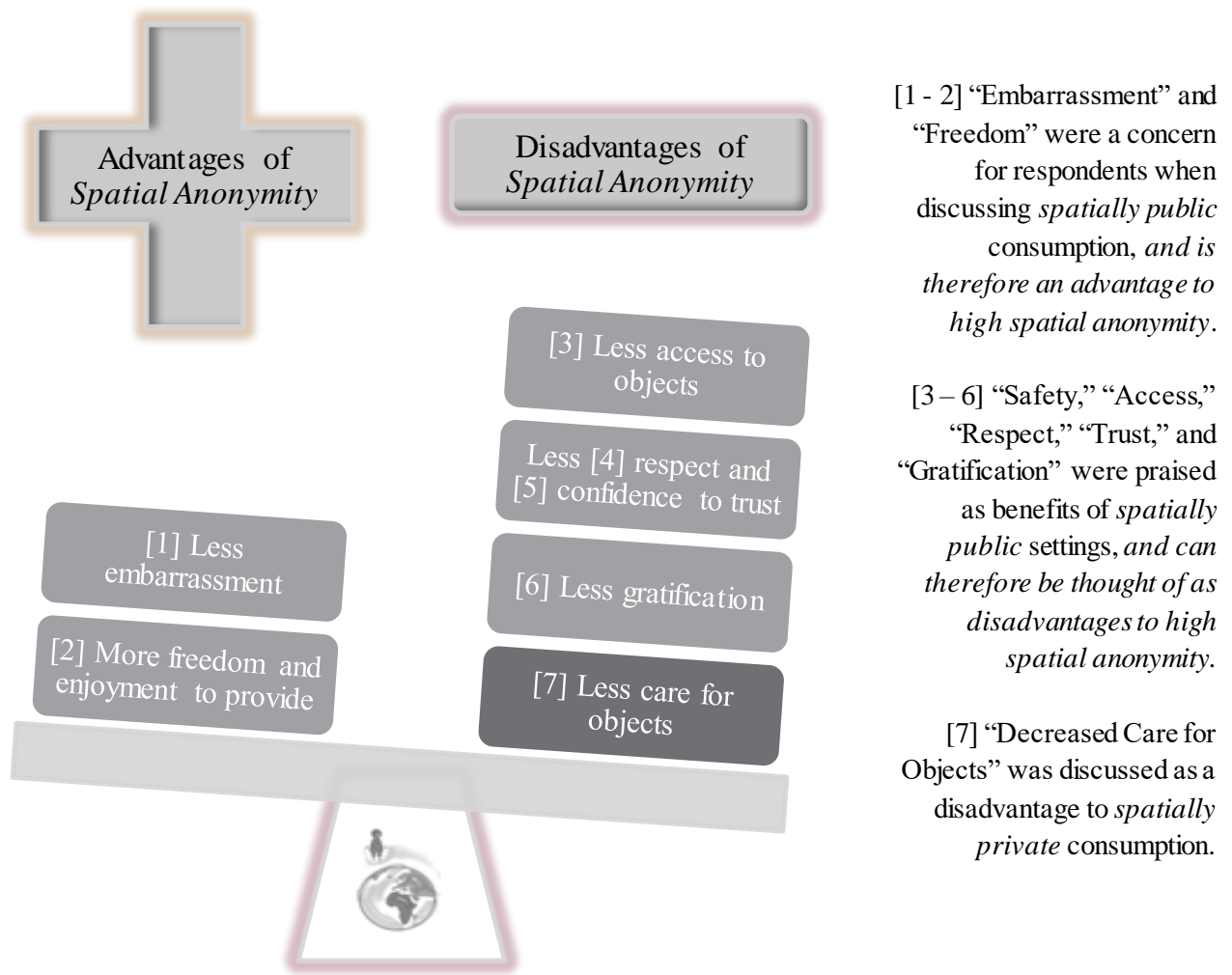
However, one rental website offered an insurance option for Providers and Takers to mitigate risk of damage to the object. Tara as a key informant explained how the insurance company's legal terms and conditions required an enquiring Taker to write what they were going to do with the object before rental could take place:

“We have to capture ‘intended use,’ [...] for example if I’m borrowing your hedge cutter and I say it’s ‘to chop down a tree,’ you can decline my request because that’s not for its intended use.”

Tara then gave an actual example, saying a person had recently requested a scanner “to scan some small wedding negatives.” Thus, rental websites featuring insurance mechanisms can offer a more spatially public usage setting because Takers are required to disclose their “intended use” of the object.

For **swapping**, the spatial distance for object usage is more likely to be private between the Provider and Taker because the Taker does not transfer the item back after use. However, when a swapping Taker reposts a previous item they received for swap, the item becomes spatially public and the original Provider can see the item in its used condition (through the newly taken photos and description). Further, sometimes swapping Takers post pictures in their review and/or send pictures directly to the Provider to show their use of the transferred object.

A high level of *Spatial Anonymity* offered a mix of perceived advantages and disadvantages as described by respondents (**Figure 4.10**). These are now discussed, starting with the advantages of a spatially public setting (i.e., characterised by low anonymity).

**Figure 4.10** Proposed Advantages and Disadvantages of (High) Spatial Anonymity.

*High Spatial Anonymity indicates that Involvement and information is kept private away from the presence of others.*

### 4.5.1.1 Spatially Public Consumption: **Low Spatial Anonymity**

When the spatial distance between users was low (i.e., public), users gave their appreciation for the following *advantages*: (1) Increased access to information, user history, and accessible goods; (2) Increased gratification for Providers who wanted to observe their items being used and enjoyed; (3) Increased confidence with trusting other users because of a public online reputation; (4) Increased respect for community norms that discourage online “trolling,” irresponsible behaviour and exploitation of the commons.



**Increased Access.** In an offline setting, a person’s private items are often hidden from their peers, but P2P renting and swapping networks allowed more transparency of possessions. Lynne as a rental Taker expressed this as her favourite aspect of online renting when she said, “My friends don’t actually know I have these really awesome, really expensive things, like an air mattress for example, I mean why or how in conversation would that really come up? And I’m more than happy to rent it to them.” She continued, “you are letting people know what you actually have that you are happy to share or rent or lend out.” Bob also appreciated technology being able to enable publicising shareable items:

“What would be interesting is that when you’ve successfully rented in or out, if the website could somehow automatically post that to whatever social media channel you use like Facebook or Twitter and then all of a sudden everyone in my universe would know that I own pétanque balls!”

Meanwhile, swapping users appreciated being able to expand their network of available exchange partners overseas. Clarissa appreciated having items to swap from far away. She explained:

“I like being able to get clothes that I couldn’t get from around here, there are lots of, like I traded with a girl from Brazil for clothes that I would not have gotten anywhere locally.”

However, although these objects were made spatially public online, they were still tangibly private in terms of physical space. For example, users relied on a picture and were reliant on the other user and the website to display accurate information. Thus, information asymmetry was higher for objects posted online.



**Increased Gratification.** Sarah said she loved in-person swapping because she could see the Taker enjoying her things:

“It’s always nice to know that someone wants it that you know, something that I loved and wanted and HAD is now loved and wanted by someone else, there’s a nicer incentive to that. I always enjoy the in-person swapping for that reason too, it’s walking around the room and it’s like ‘oh that person really does like that shirt that I used to own or that pair of shoes or that, you know, whatever, fill in the blank’ so that’s always fun.”

Even though Sarah did not always get to personally know everyone at her in-person swaps (i.e., the level of *Interpersonal Anonymity* could still be high), she was able to observe them enjoying her things. This also occurred with swapping when Takers shared item reviews or pictures. As discussed in the “Type of Transferred Object” dimension (Section 4.2.2.2), P2P renting users also felt gratification for seeing their items being used. However, the gratification for rental users was increased more by *Interpersonal Anonymity* as opposed to *Spatial Anonymity* because most rental users were not heavily involved in the website (so they would not be likely to see many detailed reviews on how their things were being used).



**Increased Confidence and Respect.** Many users indicated that a spatially public setting gave them more confidence with trusting other users. This idea was introduced in the “Consumer Involvement” dimension (Section 4.3.1), where users engaged in *Self Curation* by building a profile which showed past interactions on the website. By moving the transaction online (as opposed to informally offline), users became more responsible for their actions because their actions were publicly recorded and evaluated. For example, someone who buys something at a random garage sale is likely not to get as much information about the seller’s previous sales (e.g., have they lied about items before, have other buyers felt cheated after getting their purchase home?). An offline Taker cannot get this information. However, in an online second-hand community, both Providers and Takers leave feedback about each other and this information is publicly available (e.g., Grinnell, 2009).

Low spatial anonymity also coincided with less exposure to irresponsible and disrespectful users. This is discussed more under the level of *Interpersonal Anonymity*, but many respondents thought having their actions made public to the website made them more likely to be responsible, and they therefore assumed others would be the same. Consider Lynne’s thoughts on integrating her renting history on Facebook as an example:

“There are other reasons that you’d want to maintain your reputation. I mean you wouldn’t want all your friends and family to know that you didn’t return someone’s tent (laughs).”

Spatial closeness also came with *disadvantages* for users when object usage was stored as public information to other users such as: (1) Increased Embarrassment to acquire or dispose of certain types of objects. Looking back at the “Type of Transferred Object” dimension, sometimes rental Providers’ concerns over their precious items had nothing to do with financial or functional risk of items they were attached to, but more to do with a public-private possessiveness. Thus, when considering items to lend out, rental Providers considered the potential contamination Takers could inflict on their transferred object.



**Increased Embarrassment.** For example, two-way rental user Wade said he would not rent out his iPad or laptop because they were personal items and he wouldn’t want Takers to “mess with the settings or things like that” because he would need to readjust them. For this reason, rental Providers showed an avoidance for renting out items which would need to be “reincorporated” into their world once returned. Jenkins et al.’s (2014, p. 137) study on borrowing also found evidence of this occurring: “borrowed items have to be cleared of meaning when they are taken back by the owner in the same way that individuals erase meaning associated with a previous owner.” Additionally, Desired rental Provider Joel said it was “human nature to hide some things” and he would not want to lend out private items, especially if he was “embarrassed about it.”

This need for privacy over certain items crossed over to swapping disposition as well. For example, swapping Provider Amanda explained why she wouldn’t want to swap for bras, “not because [she] wouldn’t want to swap for them but because people would see what [she] use[d]!” This desire to hide traces of the self from Takers was also prevalent in Lastovicka and Fernandez’s (2005) exploration of garage sales, where a respondent thought selling used sheets was “kind of personal” (p. 818).

Guillard and Bucchia’s (2012b, p. 56) study on free recycling websites suggested when Providers give to strangers, they are liberated and “free to give ‘all kinds of objects’” because unlike a gift between friends (i.e., Low Interpersonal Anonymity), an object offered to strangers (i.e., High Interpersonal Anonymity) “symbolises neither the relationship nor the other” (see Belk & Coon, 1993), which ensures the Provider’s identity is not at risk “of being damaged by refusal” from Takers. However, my findings suggested that because swapping items were advertised in a public setting (i.e., Low Spatial Anonymity – object listings were attached to their public identity on the website, where

anyone in the community could see), some swapping Providers held concerns their items would be perceived as undesirable and they would be judged. For example, Corrine's narrative hints at a social desirability norm guiding swapping Providers in their chosen objects to list:

‘I’ve listed weird things on there sometimes, like I’ve traded a USB drive for swap, I’ve traded some Band-Aids once. But I try not to list too many items like that because [...] they’re just kind of weird, like I feel like clothing, jewellery, and makeup and like body products are acceptable and desirable things, and other weird random things just *makes you look kind of weird.*’

Further, as introduced in the “Type of Transferred Object” dimension (Section 4.2.3.2.2), “Anonymity” could also affect a consumer’s perceived embarrassment during a CC exchange. Dahl, Manchanda, and Argo (2001) said a consumer may face embarrassment during purchase, usage, and disposition situations. Even though swapping was conducted entirely online (and thus could be *interpersonally* anonymous), it is not surprising Amanda still felt embarrassed to swap for bras online, because the *Spatial Anonymity* was still public – if she listed her bras online, other users would see pictures of her bras; and if she requested a bra from someone else online, other users would see pictures of this bra in her swapping transaction history. Furthermore, research has confirmed a person does not have to be physically near a social audience to perceive judgement (e.g. Edelman, 1981).

Embarrassment can sometimes result in negative acts of consumption. For example, if a consumer feels embarrassed during a purchase situation, they may resort to shoplifting (e.g. Hoyer & MacInnis, 1998) which causes waste for the owner because they miss out on the money. Consumers may even become economically irrational for themselves by forgoing the redemption of coupons to avoid looking “cheap” (e.g. Ashworth, Darke, & Schaller, 2005) or buying extra things they don’t need to hide an embarrassing item (e.g. Blair & Roese, 2013). Similarly, with disposition, a consumer may choose more wasteful options because they lack private disposal options. As previously mentioned, swapping Provider Amanda said she would not swap out her bras because she didn’t want people to see what she used. However, another swapping respondent, Corrine, said she was “always looking to swap for bras because it’s so hard to find a good bra that fits you.” If Amanda chose to instead throw away her unwanted bras,<sup>110</sup> Corrine would miss out, and the utility of the bra would be wasted. Thus, a

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<sup>110</sup> Unfortunately, I did not ask Amanda if she had thrown her bras away. However, after making a recent move I recall that this exact choice was a path to disposition I had recently chosen: I was moving overseas so I had to fit all of my possessions from six years into two 23 kg suitcases which left a lot to be disposed. I ended up giving everything away (rather than bothering to try selling) by dropping it off in bags at a “Free Table” available at university where people came and collected what they wanted. I had about five bras which were all worn only once (impulse purchases, they

spatially public setting could cause the negative consequences of embarrassing disposition (especially personal items).

Another way swappers said they felt uncomfortable in a spatially public setting was when they wanted to “reswap” items. Sometimes, swappers would choose to “reswap” their items they acquired from a previous swap. Reswapping was the act of taking an item which had been received from a swap and deciding to provide it to someone else through a new swap. Here, *Spatial Anonymity* was low because swapping users were posting these items publically on their list of available items (thus, the original Provider would be able to see their object being reswapped). When I asked what made these respondents feel discomfort, many swappers said they didn’t want to offend the Provider by posting the item back up for swap. In this way, reswapping was perceived as similar to regifting. For example, when Clarissa remembered reswapping a dress she had swapped a year before, she clarified, “but it’s not that I don’t appreciate it,” indicating she still felt a hint of guilt for giving it away. Also consider Jillian’s thoughts on re-swapping:

“I also kinda feel bad if I re-trade something immediately because I feel like everyone is pretty active on it and then they’ll see it and then they’ll think ‘oh she didn’t like it! Uh oh!’ kinda thing haha [...] I put them on eBay first because I would have re-traded them but I don’t want it to be right away, because I want to make them think like I kinda wore it a little bit because I feel like they actually liked these items and I feel bad if I didn’t...”

However, further discussion generally revealed asymmetries with Takers’ versus Providers’ perceived acceptability of reswapping. Takers were more concerned the Providers would be offended if they saw their items reswapped than Providers professed to feel. Thus, while Providers often said Takers were free to do what they wanted with the swapped item, Takers still felt concerned for the Provider’s feelings. This is similar to the contradictions Adams, Flynn, and Norton (2012) found with givers’ and receivers’ perceptions of regifting etiquettes.

This aversion to posting certain items in a public setting logically leads into two main advantages of having a higher spatial distance between users (i.e., more private), as discussed in the next section.

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didn’t fit right). I guess because they were “underwear” I didn’t want anyone else to touch it, and also because people might see me dropping them off at the table I decided instead to just throw them away – even though they were an expensive brand and in like-new condition which according to a quick TradeMe search, would have been in demand to bra seekers.



#### 4.5.1.2 Spatially Private Consumption: **High Spatial Anonymity**

Because both swapping and renting websites mostly offered spatially *public* consumption settings, high spatial anonymity was not a salient topic. However, based on the previous section which exemplified users being embarrassed about objects in spatially public settings, it is logical to argue the opposite effect (i.e., a spatially private setting coincides with less embarrassment). I therefore suggest two main *advantages* of high spatial anonymity between users: (1) Less embarrassment, judgment, or personal criticism when using and/or disposing of certain types of objects; and therefore allows (2) More freedom and/or enjoyment to Provide (i.e., list) and/or Take (i.e., use transferred objects because they can be used without interference and/or judgment of others' prying eyes). This latter advantage has also been mentioned by Guillard and Bucchia (2012b, p. 57), who suggested meetings between strangers allow Takers "the freedom to use the object as they wish because they will not see the [Provider] again."



There were also two *disadvantages* of a spatially private setting: (1) Less care of the object; and (2) Less confidence in the consumption environment. The first disadvantage has been discussed as a benefit to a spatially public setting (and is therefore a disadvantage to spatial anonymity).



**Less Confidence.** A spatially private setting instilled confidence of safety. For example, many rental users shared a concern during *Object Transfer* on whether it was safe to meet a person in their private home, as Wade explained: "I would be fine meeting someone out in public, but I'm not that comfortable where I'd go to someone's house or I'd have them come to my house."

This concludes *Spatial Anonymity* (i.e., the referential questions of "where"). The main advantages and disadvantages applied to high and low *Spatial Anonymity* are summarised and compared in **Table 4.4**. Next, I explore *Interpersonal Anonymity* which describes whether or not users knew *who* they were collaborating with in the exchange.

**Table 4.4** Comparing High versus Low Spatial Anonymity.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>High Spatial Anonymity</p> 	<p><b>More freedom and enjoyment</b> of object because it can be used without the interference of others.</p> <p><b>Decreased embarrassment</b>, judgment, or personal criticism with object usage and/or disposal.</p>	<p><b>Less care of object</b> because the Taker's usage is kept private and therefore less likely to be socially judged or punished.</p> <p><b>Less confidence</b> that the consumption environment is safe because others are not present.</p>
<p>Low Spatial Anonymity</p> 	<p><b>More access</b> to objects in the vicinity (e.g., transparency of available possessions).</p> <p><b>More gratification</b> to Provide.</p> <p><b>More trust</b> between users because reputation is accessible.</p> <p><b>Less irresponsible behaviour</b> and disrespectful communication because a record of actions is kept public.</p>	<p><b>More embarrassment</b> to acquire or dispose of certain types of objects.</p>

## 4.5.2 Interpersonal Anonymity (i.e., Who?)



*Interpersonal Anonymity* explains whether an individual can be personally identified by others (e.g., Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012; Yoon & Rolland, 2012; Zimbardo, 1969) and therefore occurs when users are anonymous to one another. Lapidot-Lefler and Barak (2012) suggested a person is anonymous if they do not share their (1) Personal information, have (2) Visibility, and/or give (3) Eye-contact.

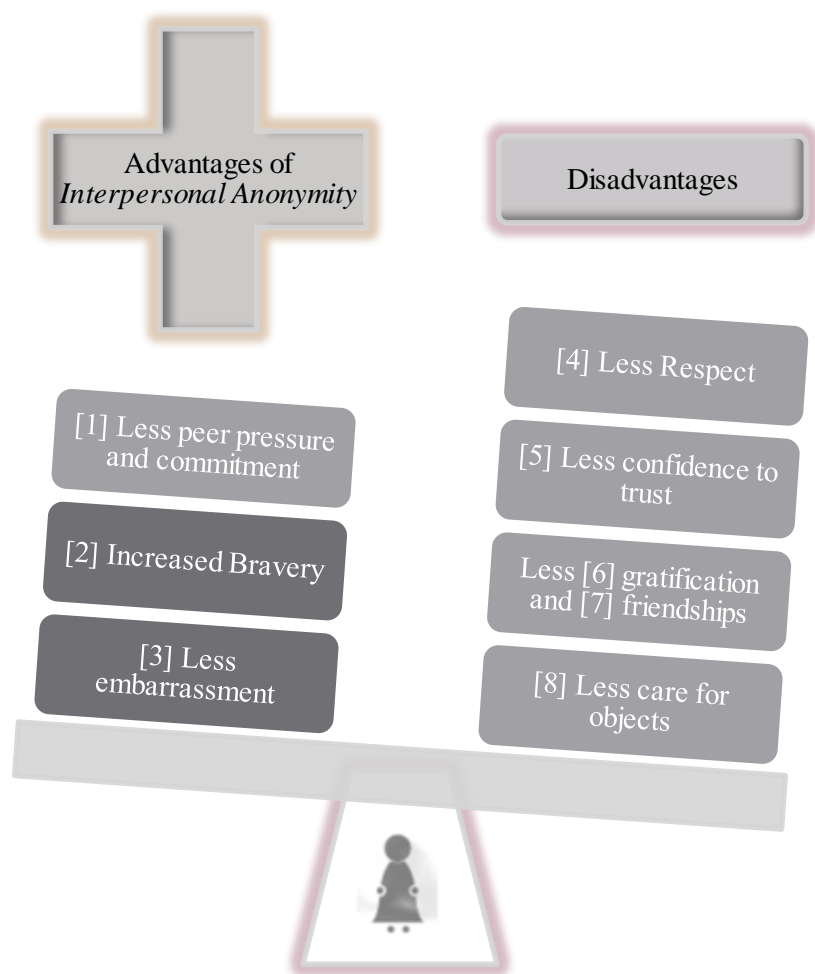
Thus, when interaction between users is conducted solely online (e.g., “System-hook-up collaboration”), the level of *Interpersonal Anonymity* depends on users’ involvement with *Self Curation* (i.e., whether or not they provide information which could be evaluated by other users). Lapidot-Lefler and Barak’s (2012) “visibility” can be increased by sharing pictures of oneself, “personal information” can be increased by sharing personal details, while “eye-contact” is usually limited to physical in-person interaction.

On eBay, interactions are often characterised as less personal and mediated by minimal social interaction, making a long-term Provider-Taker relationship less likely to develop (e.g., Ba, 2001), because transactions are intermittent and one-off (as discussed in the “Temporality” dimension, Section 4.4.1).

During an in-person swapping event, interactions are face-to-face and social. While swapping is usually not face-to-face, the ongoing high involvement with *Self Curation* can make swapping more social and less anonymous than selling sites like eBay.

Meanwhile, the P2P renting transaction exhibits both extremes, with users initially interacting online, but then having to meet face-to-face to finalise the exchange.

*Interpersonal Anonymity* came with a mix of perceived advantages and disadvantages as described by respondents (**Figure 4.11**). These are now discussed, starting with the advantages of interpersonal closeness as a form of low anonymity.

**Figure 4.11** Advantages and Disadvantages of (High) Interpersonal Anonymity.

[1] “Peer Pressure” was a concern during personally identifiable situations, and is therefore an advantage to high interpersonal anonymity.

[2 – 3] “Reduced Embarrassment,” and “Increased Bravery,” were praised as benefits to interpersonally anonymous settings.

[4 – 8] “Respect,” “Trust,” and “Gratification,” “Friendships,” and “Object Care” were praised as benefits to interpersonal identifiability, and are therefore disadvantages to high interpersonal anonymity.

*High Interpersonal Anonymity indicates that users remain anonymous and cannot be personally identified and/or do not have social contact with each other.*

### 4.5.2.1 Interpersonally Identifiable: Low Interpersonal Anonymity

When the interpersonal distance between users was low (i.e., public or interpersonally close), users appreciated the following *advantages*: (1) Increased ability to make stronger social connections with others; (2) Increased gratification for Providers to share their things; (3) Increased likelihood Takers would care for the transferred object; (4) Increased ability to build a trustworthy reputation; and (5) Decreased exposure to irresponsible behaviour and anti-social communication.



**Increased Social Connection.** When discussing their favourite aspect of renting and swapping, many respondents pointed to their ability to make social connections and communal links with one another. Rental respondents who found themselves in an isolated social situation appreciated P2P renting for bringing them face-to-face people in their community. For example, Leigh was a commuter so she did not meet many people at university and renting her textbook out allowed her to meet someone new on campus. She recounted:

“Last year I was in undergrad and I didn’t really meet anyone because they all live on campus and so I was kind of disconnected and I didn’t really take advantage, I didn’t become great friends with her, but it was nice to meet another person on campus, have a familiar face, and it kind of did serve that purpose of social interaction.”

Tara described her situation after moving to a new town:

“It’s quite funny actually because I lived in London all my life and I moved to a village in the middle of nowhere and I know no one here, so I’ve actually met people through lending my stuff out; I met a couple who borrowed my ladder and on my profile I had written that I really want to get more into sailing so I’ve been out sailing with them!”

Meanwhile Bailey as a rental Taker recalled travelling out of her usual route to rent an item from someone and recounted her appreciation with getting personal insight into a new area:

“When I picked it up, she said because of the little kids I had, [...] because I said ‘oh I haven’t been over that way,’ [...] she said, ‘look this is the place to go and there’s this playground and here’s some bread to feed the ducks,’ [...] it made me do an activity with my kids, not that I need the excuses but made me do something different as well and that’s why I kinda like it, it makes you, even

if a, with our local noticeboard of doing stuff, it actually makes you go to places in the community you normally wouldn't visit. Yeah, it's like a little excursion."

Tara and Bailey's descriptions supports van de Glind's (2013, p. 22) motivational finding that CC websites can help those who have moved to a new city or neighbourhood find new friends and get to know the area.

However, Wade echoed many respondents when he clarified that his goal was not to form actual friendships but rather to gain more personal interactions and acquaintances:

"I haven't had any friendships or anything like that develop, but I've met people where it wasn't just the exchange right, it was like, you sat there for 20 to 30 minutes and just kinda talked, you know just stuff in general."

Leigh, Tara, Bailey, and Wade's experiences illustrate a prominent reason for getting involved with P2P renting, because users could get to know their neighbours and find peers with similar experiences, as might be expected in a context where the outcome depends on collaboration between participants (Belk, 2010).

Swapping respondents also spoke of getting to interact with likeminded people. For example, Kelly explained one of her favourite aspects of swapping:

"I think one of the big things I like, at least on the site I'm on, is that there is this sense of community so you actually get to know the people you're swapping with even though, actually, one girl actually lives in my town and I would never have met her if it wasn't for swapping. You kind of get to make friends with all these different people on the site. People can go on there on the site and ask questions and get advice about practically anything. So I like the community aspect of it."

Sarah explained how she became part of a close-knit group with swapping friends:

"Whenever we're going to swap we always have a communication, you know one of them will email me and say 'hey, I just saw that you posted this, I love it! you know what are you looking for, or is there anything that I have that you like?' and we'll go back and forth and we'll chit chat a little bit about you know personal things and things like that and [Irene] lives in Florida and [Gemma's] in Pennsylvania and [Natalia] is out in Oregon and [...] we'll just periodically chat you know whenever we post something we'll make a comment like 'hey

that's such a great shirt!' you know 'if you see anything that I have you know then let's swap' and it's just really great, you know it's kind of fun because we'll constantly exchange within each other."

When I asked Amanda what her favourite part of swapping was, she also responded similarly:

"I really like chatting with the girls there, even though like we only chat when we're swapping haha [...] like I think I talked about a book and then our personal lives, going to the beach, and just stuff you talk to a friend about and boyfriends and stuff."

Joanna agreed, saying she had become friends with a select few people with who she had "had several successful swaps" and with who she "share[d] similar interests." She explained:

"There's a few people who I've um, yeah I've kinda built friendships with, I mean it's so hard because you know you're half way across the country but you know with some of them I've really gotten to know them pretty well and we just instant message each other on Facebook or something or we'll just talk using like the chat."

Social interactions also occurred with points-based swapping websites, although they tended to occur less often because users did not need to directly communicate for the transaction to transpire. However, when users started to notice they were sending their items to the same address (thus having repeat swaps) and they had each other's email address, messages of gratitude often initiated a closer connection between users. For example, Lauren recollected her experience providing one of her books in a swap:

"She emailed me because I think she was just really happy with one of the books and was just so glad to find it and it was something she'd been looking for and we ended up having conversations about the book and what we read and um, our families and all sorts of things.... yeah, and occasionally, um, I would get off her a couple of this particular author's book, and she sent me a free one along with it because I was obviously enjoying the series. I thought, 'that's really nice!'"

However, like rental user Wade, Sarah as a swapping user clarified like many other respondents that the social aspect was an added bonus to their primary motivation (which was usually centred on the transferred object). For example, Sarah explained:

“I mean it’s great to have an online community but that’s not necessarily a make or break it’s more about the clothes haha.”

These examples of users benefitting from social connections are similar to the findings of Ozanne and Ballantine (2010) and Ozanne and Ozanne (2011) who found families were supported by other toy library members during this difficult liminal period. Thus, the desire for community and social interaction within P2P models deviates from commercial access models, where Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) found consumers resisting the efforts of a car sharing company to build a brand community. Further, the common overlap of swapping and renting respondents seeking interpersonal connections between users supports Appelgren and Bohlin’s (2015, p. 152) claim that although different in character, various forms of second-hand exchange typically involve exchange that is “often richly socially embedded, involving verbal or written exchanges regarding the quality and history of the thing being sold, sometimes involving personal anecdotes as well as meetings between” Taker and Provider.



**Increased Gratification.** Beyond making a social connection, another advantage of interpersonal identifiability expressed by rental and swapping respondents was that it increased their gratification to provide. Recall from Section 4.2.2.2 examples where Sentimentalists felt gratification from seeing their things being used and Cheap Altruists helping others gain access to their goods. Sentimentalists felt gratification by from discussing the object with the Taker, while Cheap Altruists felt a more general gratification with helping others and connecting with their community. For example, Bailey explained her gratification to pay a rental fee as a Taker:

“It’s that sort of feel good, that um, you know she’s helping out, you’re getting it, maybe not even cheaper, but it’s just sort of rather than just going to a big faceless corporate entity, you’re giving it someone you know, and you’re getting to know people in your community.”

Overall, rental respondents placed less importance on social connections increasing their gratification than swapping users. This may have been because the online community was lacking on rental websites (as described by rental users), or it may have been because rental users did not usually maintain long-term relationships with each other (as opposed to swapping respondents who often exchanged objects with the same people). Many swapping users described such connections as a key component to their involvement as a Provider. For example, Joanna explained why she liked to dispose of her things to users she had gotten to know on swapping websites:



“It makes me feel good that I was able to help someone that I knew because you know you never get to, often when you donate stuff it’s just gone and that’s it, but you know if you know the person and you know their story and you have a connection with them it makes you feel good to help them out.”

Joanna gave an example:

“One of my friends from [swapping website] has a little girl and [...] it wasn’t part of the swap but I told her, ‘I’m gonna be sending a purse’ and I filled up the purse with stuff for a little girl and so she took pictures of her like playing with all this stuff, it was like a headscarf, a pair of sunglasses, a fake pearl necklace, she like dressed herself with everything that I put in the purse and she posted pictures and um, she said you know, ‘she says thank you’ and she had her write a thank you note and she took a picture of it and posted it on Facebook and tagged me in it so haha it was adorable.”

Meanwhile Sarah explained why she felt extra gratified to swap her cherished coat to a favourite swapper:

“I think it’s great because I feel very familiar with her and I felt that the coat [...] went to someone [...] who I’ve established an online relationship with so I feel is really gonna enjoy it even more.”

Kelly as a Sentimentalist swapping Provider liked to pass her things on to someone she knew would appreciate them. She explained:

“I like [...] passing it onto someone else, [...] versus just sending them to [...] goodwill or other thrift stores [...] I guess it’s just not knowing where it’s going to [...] I like the personal aspect better if that makes sense [...] They may mention something like, ‘oh that top you sent me a couple months ago, I’ve gotten a lot of compliments on it, or it still fits’ stuff like that I really like.”

This finding of users gaining increased gratification for providing items to Takers they have an interpersonal connection with (compared to being anonymous) is similar to Lastovicka and Fernandez’s (2005, p. 820) discussion on “receiver congruity,” where consumers needed to create a certain connection of congruity with the Taker when divesting meaningful or positively charged possessions. Cheetham (2009) similarly said Providers were likely to seek Takers who would “look after the[ir] cherished possession” and “appreciate its meanings” (p. 316). This transfer of care over

objects leads into the third advantage of interpersonally close exchange discussed by participants: Takers would look after a Provider's possession with care.



**Increased Care and Responsibility.** Similar to past research which has found social norms guide the use of communally shared items (e.g., Ozanne & Ozanne, 2011), most respondents held norms for object care because renting and swapping were socially co-created activities (as introduced in the “Consumer Involvement” dimension, Section 4.3.4). This finding is in contrast to Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) who found a lack of care in the case of anonymous B2C car sharing. Although many respondents brought up the expected economic incentives for object-care, such as swapping users wanting to make sure the item could be reswappable and renting users wanting to get back their deposit, there was also a moral incentive to care for objects. Beyond the extrinsic punishment of fines, Takers also spoke of an internal social guilt where they were averse to wronging the other person. For renting, this social guilt came from the risk of damaging the Provider's possession, while with swapping, the guilt came from not appreciating the Provider's possession (e.g., reswapping was sometimes perceived as similar to regifting).

This moral-economic interplay of guilt influencing object care can be explained further by considering an experimental study on parents picking up their children late from daycare. After adding a small fine for being late (there was originally no late-fee), Gneezy and Rustichini (2000) found the number of parents who were late to pick up their child actually *doubled*. This surprising finding demonstrates how an economic punishment (the fee) can make a person feel entitled to perform negative behaviour. Because the parents perceived the fee as a surcharge (i.e., payment for the daycare workers' extra labour) as opposed to a penalty (i.e., punishment for showing up late and inconveniencing the daycare workers who had to work overtime), they felt entitled to pick up their kids late because they were paying extra for it. Thus, economic fines and rewards can potentially transform a transaction into more of a commercial commodity so people lower their moral incentives to treat each other as individuals. The result is a transformed perception of the exchange, with a shift between transactional and relational characteristics (e.g., Ganesan, 1994; Wilson, 1995).

Festinger, Pepitone, and Newcomb (1952) referred to this situation of not being seen or paid attention to as an individual as “deindividuation.” Applying the daycare example to Zimbardo's (1970) theory of deindividuation, the input of “altered responsibility” for showing up late would lead to the minimisation of a person's “self-observation, self-evaluation, and concern for social evaluation.” This would then weaken a person's “guilt, shame, and fear” (which led to the parents no longer feeling social and moral guilt about the daycare workers having to work extra hours).

Perceptions of punishment and deindividuation were relevant theories to explain my findings, where for instance, I found an amalgamation of interpersonal anonymity and a respondent's perception of punishment impacting the intensity of a Taker's care over an object. For example, with P2P renting, where users were required to return the item face-to-face, Earl said he took extreme care with items as a rental Taker because he would feel embarrassed, guilty, intimidated and "afraid of the look [they'd] give" him if he returned a broken item. Earl explained further:

"I'd feel bad if I broke someone's tool, especially when I bring it back to them, so it's sad to say I'm just afraid of the look they they're going to give me and the fact that they might – I don't know, I'm kind of intimidated that they're going to do something to me or I'm just going to feel bad.

"A way around that would be if there was some kind of place you could return it [...] if I could return it to someone besides the owner, I'd feel a little less guilty."

Likewise, two-way rental user Leigh said she was "hesitant when using people's items because [she didn't] want to disappoint them" and was "nervous that [she] may ruin someone else's item." Thus, beyond financial risks, Earl and Leigh also showed an aversion for disappointing the Provider. In Earl's case, this could be lessened by raising the interpersonal distance during the involvement of *Object Transfer* – he felt shame when presented with eye contact and visibility to the object owner (e.g., Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012), who he considered as a relevant individual deserving his social obligation.

Applying Earl's example to Zimbardo's (1970) theory of deindividuation discussed above, Earl believed having a third party take over the object's transfer would affect his perceived "responsibility." In contrast to seeing his involvement tied to relational norms, Earl's discussion suggests a third party would further commoditise the situation and create a sense of deindividuation where Earl would perceive the person collecting his object as more of a transactional party (as opposed to a relational individual). As an afterthought, Earl also confessed his uncertainty that a third party may affect his care over the object: "Hopefully I'd be just as responsible when I'm using it, but I don't know." Thus, having a third party may affect his perceived responsibility over caretaking for the transferred object.

Meanwhile, Leigh felt more of a general guilt from knowing the person was being wronged, which was similar to the guilt Natalia as a swapping user discussed:

“I don’t really know where the guilt is coming from [...] it’s just kinda like an internal guilt, it’s not really like shame that I’m gonna run into them again or I know them.”

While this type of guilt wasn’t necessarily lessened by increasing the interpersonal distance, having a lower interpersonal distance could potentially increase Leigh or Natalia’s guilt as predicted by Diener’s (1979) theory of deindividuation. Indeed, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012, p. 891) found many Zipcar members (who experienced car sharing in a setting of high interpersonal anonymity) felt no responsibility toward one another when it came to dropping the car off on time. Further, these users were also fined by Zipcar, which may have reduced their sense of guilt (similar to the daycare example). The potential for decreased care and responsibility is discussed further under the topic of negative reciprocity (discussed in the “Anonymity” dimension, Section 4.6.2).



**Increased Trust.** Another advantage of having interpersonally close connections was an increased confidence other users could be trustworthy. Many participants perceived P2P rental sites as hyper-local communities, where trust was easily given due to users describing themselves as a network of dense and akin connections. For example, Bob likened it to the six degrees of separation concept (Travers & Milgram, 1969), saying “if I didn’t know them through someone, I knew them from someone who knew someone.” Leigh deduced that due to the current small user base, everyone using the site would mainly be well-meaning people with good intentions. Likewise swapping user Jillian considered the website as a close-knit community:

“I mean the most surprising thing was just how nice the community was because if you go on eBay I mean it’s so big and people are just like ‘give me feedback’ and then leave you alone for the rest of your life kinda thing.”



**Increased Respect.** Thus, this leads into the final advantage of having a low interpersonal distance between users, that respondents perceived interpersonal closeness to be correlated with a decreased exposure to irresponsible behaviour and negative communication from other users. For example, Jack as a rental Provider explained the advantages to adding Facebook and other social media history to a person’s reputation on the renting website (thus creating a lower interpersonal distance between users):

“So you can tie a real person to it, I think that’d be perfect [...] because there’s really no punishment for people who are on the internet scamming people, [...] you can access a lot of these sites completely anonymously, you can get on

there and do anything you want, and you're pretty much anonymous [...] a lot of people hide behind a curtain on the Internet, [...] people need to be willing to reveal their face and say look this is who I am, and I'm a trustworthy person in real life, and I don't care about, about putting my information on the Internet, because I'm selling a product and I need you to know who I am so I can sell it to you, you know?"

Swapping respondents mostly wanted to keep things friendly as a task of *Self Curation* when communicating with other users. For example, Rose explained how users respected each other's things and feelings throughout the exchange process because users were interpersonally close:

"I find that [...] the people on there are more, friendlier, they're more into the site, they are more into making friends."

This perception has been supported with previous research on anonymity. For example, Uslander (1999) found people are more likely to behave ethically when they recognise they are harming a definable individual (i.e., a relational, social, moral obligation) as opposed to an abstract business entity (i.e., a transactional obligation). This is because situations of deindividuation can reduce a person's commitment to social norms (e.g., Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995). Thus, veering away from deindividuation was perceived as advantageous to users seeking a communally trustworthy website.

Being interpersonally close also came with disadvantages, such as: (1) Increased Social Pressure; and (2) Decreased bravery for confrontation when something went wrong.



**Increased Peer Pressure.** Because swapping relationships sometimes became more close and involved, there was evidence of social influence pressuring swappers to "impulse swap." Clarissa explained:

"My least favourite, [...] how do I want to put this, [...] I feel like I should be really nice. There is one user that she will offer me things all the time, and I'm not particularly interested in trading for the value that she has but I can't deny that those are really cool things so I kinda feel like I'm obligated to make a trade, [...] so 'yes, I'll trade with you' kinda thing, but it doesn't happen too often.

"When I was on the [points-based swapping] website I would turn down trades all the time because I didn't want the trade value [...] and they wouldn't know because they don't know who I am, [...] they don't know I was the one that was

supposed to be trading, but on [other swapping website] you have a face, you have a name, [...] I feel like I should be nicer to them!”

Overall, renting respondents were not faced with this type of guilt because rental users did not often repeat interactions with each other. Some rental websites had low levels of *Self Curation* where the Provider would not see the requesting Taker’s face, their real name, or a personalised message asking to rent the item (instead a generic message generated from the website), so declining a rental request was less riddled with social commitments. Indeed, personalised messages contributed to feeling socially obligated during *Negotiation*. For example, Natalia said she sometimes felt pressured to say “yes” to swap requests:

“I don’t really feel guilty *too often* [...] I mean the only time I would feel bad is if someone maybe took a ton of time to look at like, on [swapping website] they have a wish list, I think, and yeah, on [other swapping website] there’s like a watch list too, but if somebody spends a lot of time researching what I’m looking for and then I turned it down then I would feel bad but not if they just sent me a quick message.”

Rental respondent Joel also considered social norms when he considered informally trying to rent a drill from a neighbour (compared to renting it online). He explained:

“It’s unlikely your neighbour would say, ‘oh sure, you can borrow my drill, it’s only a \$1 an hour.’ They’d just say, ‘oh sure, bring it back.’ And it’s that informal borrowing going on. But it’s not always convenient to either party [...] it depends, [...] if someone asks you and it’s very inconvenient, you thought you might be using it, you’d be in an awkward position. [...] I wouldn’t want to put someone [...] in an awkward position by asking for something which maybe wouldn’t be available or they weren’t sure.”



**Decreased Bravery.** Interpersonal identifiability caused some users apprehension to

speak up and accuse others of doing wrong. Many swapping respondents said they needed to be careful leaving negative feedback and/or asking for retaliation from a bad swap (e.g., if the item was broken or not as described) with other swappers because they did not want to damage the relationship and wanted to keep things amicable for future swaps. This perception of feeling more open to speak up to strangers leads into the first advantage of interpersonal distance, a lessened discomfort with confronting exchange partners, as further discussed in the next section.

### 4.5.2.2 Interpersonally Private: High Interpersonal Anonymity

When the interpersonal distance between users was high (i.e., private, interpersonally distant), users gave their appreciation for the following *advantages*: (1) Increased bravery to express opinions and give honest ratings or recommendations; (2) Decrease in embarrassment, judgment or personal criticism; and (3) Decreased loss of privacy and personal harassment.



**Increased Bravery.** The first benefit perceived by respondents to remain interpersonally distant was an increased bravery to express themselves, give honest ratings, ask for favours, and evade social obligations. Going back to the discomfort of confrontation, both swapping and renting respondents appreciated the higher interpersonal distance typical of formal<sup>111</sup> relationships because it allowed them to ask for rectification when wronged.

From a Provider perspective, Charlotte echoed swapping user Kelly's explanation that asking for something back from a friend was not as easy as from a stranger when she compared renting her belongings out to strangers as opposed to lending to friends:

'If something does go wrong if someone's broken something and if it's a friend or family, you sort of get annoyed at that time, but you sort of let it go because it's not worth, I guess at the end of the day, a material thing is not worth spoiling a friendship or a relationship about, and I think that's in the case where you know that person and you've got that close relationship with, [...] it's something where you sort of go, 'forgive and forget.'

'Whereas if it is a stranger [...] I'd be more open to speaking to that person [...] because there is no, there is no sort of prior relationship or anything and if he or she's sheeshing at me I won't be seeing them again anyhow, so yeah!'

Meanwhile, Takers appreciated *Interpersonal Anonymity* making it easier to ask for items they wanted to rent or swap (i.e., the involvement of *Partner/Object Selection* and *Negotiation*). Many renting respondents said they thought it was "rude" and "awkward" to ask neighbours to borrow needed items. As rental Taker Bailey put it:

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<sup>111</sup> This Anonymity distinction is thoroughly intertwined with Belk's (2010) Sharing In and Sharing Out comparison which I first introduced in Section 2.3. Essentially, consumers are likely to engage in a continuum of two extremes: (1) Providing In (with friends and family, more often interpersonally close); and (2) Providing Out (commercially, typically more interpersonally distant). The effects of this distinction are discussed further in the "Market Mediation" dimension (Section 4.66).

“I know some places that we’ve lived and we haven’t known people, so you don’t go to your neighbour and say, ‘Hey can I borrow this?’ because they don’t know you.”

Also recall Desired rental Provider Joel’s thoughts on social pressures: “If someone asks to borrow something [...] you’d be in an awkward position. I wouldn’t want to put someone in an awkward position by asking for something, which maybe wouldn’t be available or they weren’t sure.” Joel further explained his discomfiture with asking a stranger to borrow in a traditional face-to-face situation:

“I could have borrowed one from my neighbour, but [...] ‘do I really want to go and knock on his doors?!’ [...] there’s probably zero percent chance that he’s using the drill at the time. But [...] rather than interrupt their lifestyle, [...] I wouldn’t want to disturb their privacy for this, the simple fact of borrowing a drill. It seems a bit trivial, but that’s, maybe that’s the modern society. You don’t go talking to your neighbours.”

This discomfiture can dampen a person’s inclination to share. Many respondents wouldn’t think of saying, as Joel put it, “oh sure, you can borrow my drill, it’s only \$1 an hour” to an enquiring neighbour. Thus, a reoccurring theme with users was their appreciation of a formal mechanism, the P2P rental website, to broker the exchange and reduce this social barrier to renting.

Swapping respondents also gave examples of feeling uncertain and awkward to ask strangers in an interpersonally close offline setting (e.g., with eye contact and visibility) if they could swap items. For example, Lauren explained her experience as an artist wanting to swap artwork with other artists:

“Around the various exhibitions and cities, if you go to the exhibitions you are inclined to meet other artists and you become familiar with them in this community art centres where you get to know the other members. So you know, you do slowly get to know a group and if you especially admire them you’re inclined to say something, and then, sometimes they’ll say something to you, and then you’ll say ‘ohhh’ *and if you one of you is brave enough*, you can say, ‘swap?’ ahaha.”

Lauren then gave an example of someone she knew who swapped offline all the time, saying such an impressive feat was “cool” and something she wasn’t brave enough to attempt:



“She’s just really blatant about it, she’ll ask them, ‘I’ll give you a painting if you’ll fix my porch’ haha and she gets a lot of no’s but [...] Yeah haha. I don’t think I could be that blatant...”

Thus, by moving the original in-person request to online messaging, respondents were able to make requests “under the protective cloak of anonymity” cyberspace provides through “deindividuation” (McKenna & Bargh, 2000, p. 62). Suler (2004) called this behavioural difference between Direct-contact collaboration and System-hook-up collaboration the “online disinhibition effect.” This finding goes in line with previous research which has found interpersonal distance allows an individual to become less preoccupied with social judgment (e.g., Joinson, 2001; Matheson & Zanna, 1988). It also adds to Marcoux’s (2009) finding that many people avoid sharing with friends or family because of the humiliation they may feel from gift refusal (e.g., if a Taker denied a gift and made judgments about the poor quality/value of the object) and embarrassment from feelings of obligation.

Interpersonal distance also allowed respondents the confidence to evade social obligations. For example, although Jillian said she sometimes felt guilty saying “no” to certain swap requests, she also compared it favourably to in-person sharing and swapping: “I feel like since it’s on the Internet, saying no is a lot easier than in real life!”



**Decreased Embarrassment.** As introduced in the *Spatial Anonymity* dimension, respondents also perceived interpersonal closeness with increased personal criticisms, social judgment, and embarrassment. As shown by the previous examples, many respondents felt *System-hook-up collaboration* lessened such experiences because users were not required to be visible, make eye contact, or share personal information to complete a transaction.



**Less Spam and Harassment.** Although previous research (e.g., Belanger, Hiller, & Smith, 2002; Pan & Zinhan, 2006) has suggested privacy disclosures (i.e., when a website promises user content is kept secure) increase a users’ willingness to participate in the system and overall feelings of trust, none of my respondents brought up privacy disclosures as a concern. Keetels’ (2012) exploration of P2P renting found privacy assurance to be insignificant in building a Provider’s or Taker’s exchange willingness. Perhaps this is because privacy “Terms and Conditions” have become ubiquitous (and complicated) and consumers just assume it is already prevalent before signing up to a website. However, as an example of a more obvious privacy issue, many respondents were apprehensive to share their phone number as a way of *Self Curation* and a

medium for *Negotiation* (i.e., efforts from the “Consumer Involvement” dimension, Section 4.3.3.2). For example, Amanda thought aloud on providing her phone number to fellow swappers:



“Sometimes I’ve thought about when I swap like giving out my phone number, but sometimes I’m like what happens if I don’t end up liking the person and they start harassing me on the phone or something?!”

Amanda’s fears of sharing her phone number came from her experience with the swapping website’s email function. For example, she recalled her experience with overzealous desired Takers: “Some of them get impatient and they start harassing you to like hurry up and stuff..”

One P2P renting website *only* offered phone numbers as a way to contact Providers – there was no option to email fellow users. This presented another reason of support for flexibility with “Consumer Involvement” which provided users with different modes of contact and privacy. For example, Lynne complained one website only showed the telephone number of Providers, saying “I kind of instantly go ‘emmmm I don’t really know if I want my telephone number out there for everyone to know and I don’t know if I’d feel comfortable ringing someone up.”” Thus, something as simple as contact information had deterred a rental user from getting involved on the site. Having the flexibility to stay interpersonally distant was therefore perceived as advantageous to respondents when it came to maintaining certain levels of privacy (e.g., from being interrupted in a personal setting, getting spammed by users).

Interpersonal anonymity also came with *disadvantages* for users, mainly a loss of the benefits of interpersonal identifiability, which were social connections, gratification, care for the object, confidence to trust, and respect for community norms (these were discussed in Section 4.5.2.1). This concludes *Interpersonal Anonymity* (i.e., the referential questions of “who”). The main advantages and disadvantages applied to high and low *Interpersonal Anonymity* are summarised and compared in **Table 4.5**

**Table 4.5** Comparing High versus Low Interpersonal Anonymity.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>High Interpersonal Anonymity</p> 	<p><b>Increased bravery</b> to express opinions and give honest ratings or recommendations.</p> <p><b>Less embarrassment</b>, judgment, or personal criticism.</p> <p><b>Less commitment</b> to the community (i.e., user may feel more flexibility).</p> <p><b>Less personal spam</b> or online stalking/harassment.</p>	<p><b>Increased anti-social behaviour</b> deviating against community norms.</p>
<p>Low Interpersonal Anonymity</p> 	<p><b>Gaining friendships</b> and social connections with other users.</p> <p><b>Increased gratification</b> from sharing.</p> <p><b>Increased care</b> for object.</p> <p><b>Increased confidence</b> with trust-building when building a reputation.</p> <p><b>More respect</b> of social norms; less exposure to irresponsible behaviour and communication.</p>	<p><b>Increased peer pressure</b> causing impulse/unplanned exchange.</p> <p><b>Less bravery</b> to speak up when something goes wrong.</p>

This concludes the “Anonymity” dimension which has looked at *who* and *where* respondents were interacting with during swapping and renting exchange. The next two sections explore *why* respondents engaged in renting and swapping through the dimensions of “Market Mediation” (4.6) and “Political Consumerism” (4.7).

## 4.6 Market Mediation

Market mediation refers to motivating factors and mechanisms driving Providers and Takers in an exchange. Bardhi and Eckhardt's (2012) original conception of "Market Mediation" distinguished between "not-for-profit" and "for profit" consumptionscapes (p. 885). This stems from two opposing paradigms describing motivations for exchange: (1) Formalist – rational economic reasons; and (2) Substantivist – social, natural reasons (e.g., Caliskan & Callon, 2009). For example, Blau (1964) said exchange could be economic (where money was usually present) or social (where money was usually absent). The typical "Market Mediation" dimension therefore attempts to dichotomise between a sharing economy (e.g., gifting) and a capitalistic economy (illustrated in **Figure 4.12**).

**Figure 4.12** Traditional Dichotomy of Market Exchange.



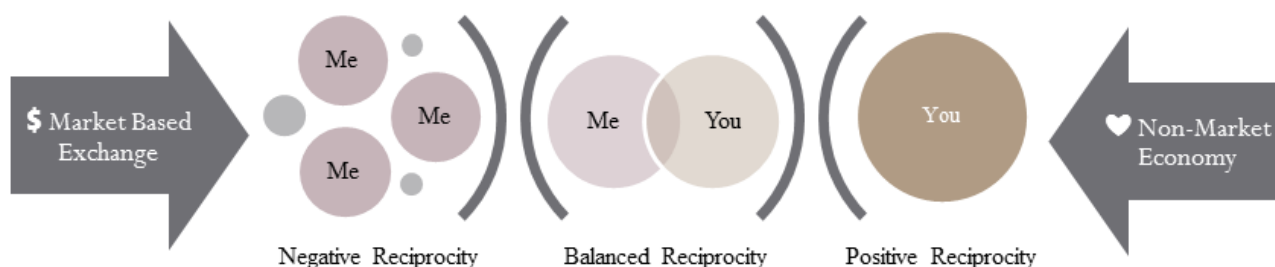
However, recent research<sup>112</sup> criticises these dichotomies which suggest sharing is "free." Just because someone is sharing something and no explicit compensation is discussed does not mean they may implicitly develop to expect something in return. Further, just because someone is providing their items for profit does not necessarily mean they are not also motivated by social mechanisms, especially over time. Morgan and Hunt (1994, p. 23) explained "economic exchanges can evolve into relationships and acquire characteristics typical of social exchange." Although renting and swapping users started off as virtual strangers (making the exchange transactional), many respondents told stories where they came to regard each other in more friendly terms (making the exchange also become relational). Because swapping and renting were perceived as social by many respondents (discussed in the "Anonymity" dimension, Section 4.5) compared to other types of economic CC exchange types

<sup>112</sup> As evidenced in Section 1.1.3.

(e.g., eBay), I was curious how closer peer-to-peer connections would impact perceptions of equality within an economically-mediated exchange. That is, what happens when economic reciprocation (e.g., money) enters an exchange between friends and neighbours?

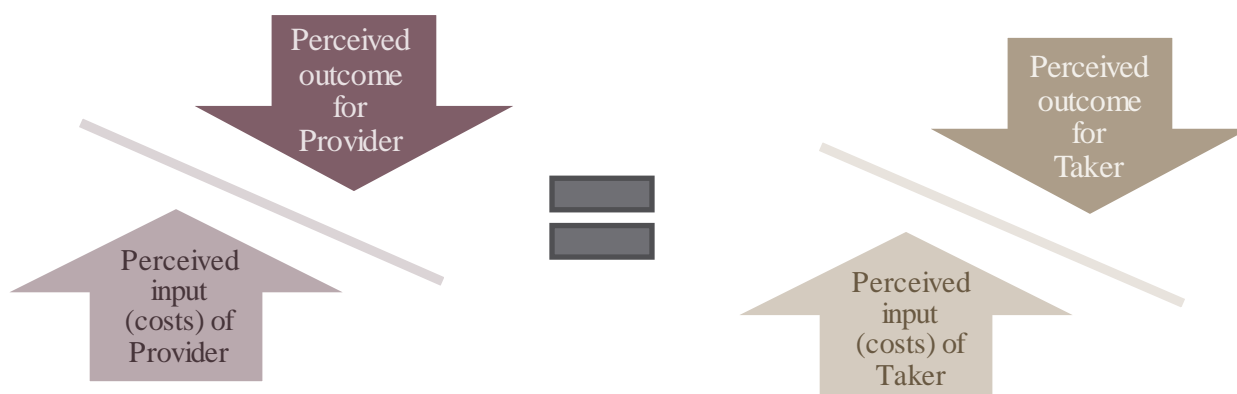
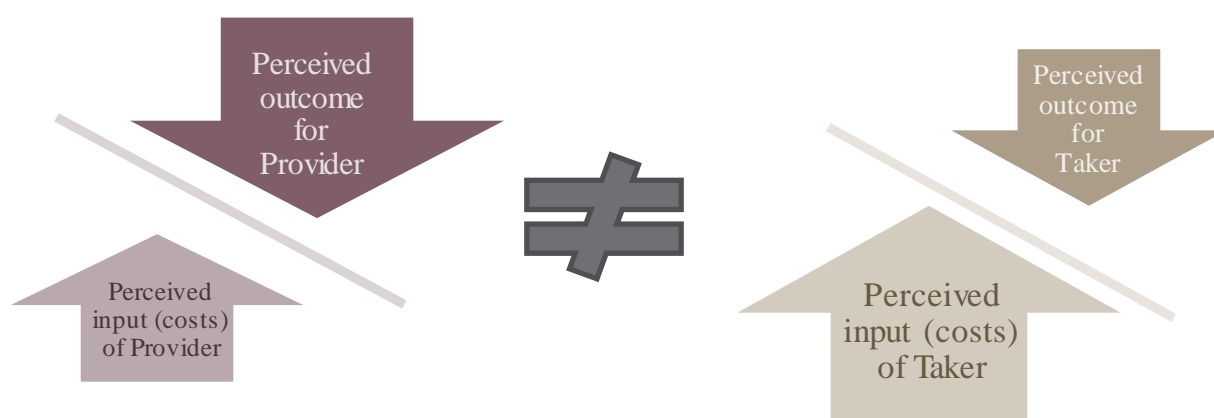
I think Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012, p. 885) were too vague with their formal definition of “Market Mediation.” However, they also later discussed “reciprocity” within their findings and discussion, which I think is a more interesting concept for understanding exchange processes beyond the traditional distinction of for profit and not-for-profit structures. As explained by Sahlins (1972, p. 195), reciprocity includes a continuum of reciprocal “sidedness” where users can engage in (1) **Negative reciprocity**, guided by self-interestedness; or (2) Generalised or **Positive reciprocity**, characterised by disinterestedness (giving without the expectation of compensation), neighbourly compassion, and personal mutuality. Between these counterparts lies the chimerical “spirit of the exchange,”<sup>113</sup> (3) **Balanced reciprocity**, where a direct exchange is ruled by “vice-versa movements.” This latter form of exchange has been commonly examined in marketing, where a quid pro quo mentality exists (Bagozzi, 1975) and exchange is governed by a fair market value defined by each user. These forms of reciprocity are illustrated in **Figure 4.13**.

**Figure 4.13** Market Mediation through Exchange Reciprocation.



The purest form of balanced reciprocity and contribution can be explained using equity theory (see **Figure 4.14** and **Figure 4.15** for illustrated examples), which focuses on perceptions of fairness in an exchange (e.g., Huppertz, Arenson, & Evans, 1978; Pritchard, 1969). Equity theory explains how users compare their perceived inputs (i.e., costs of Consumer Involvement) and outputs (i.e., value, gains) with what they perceive the inputs and outputs are of their exchange partner. If they perceive this comparison as equal and fair, then balanced reciprocity and contribution has occurred.

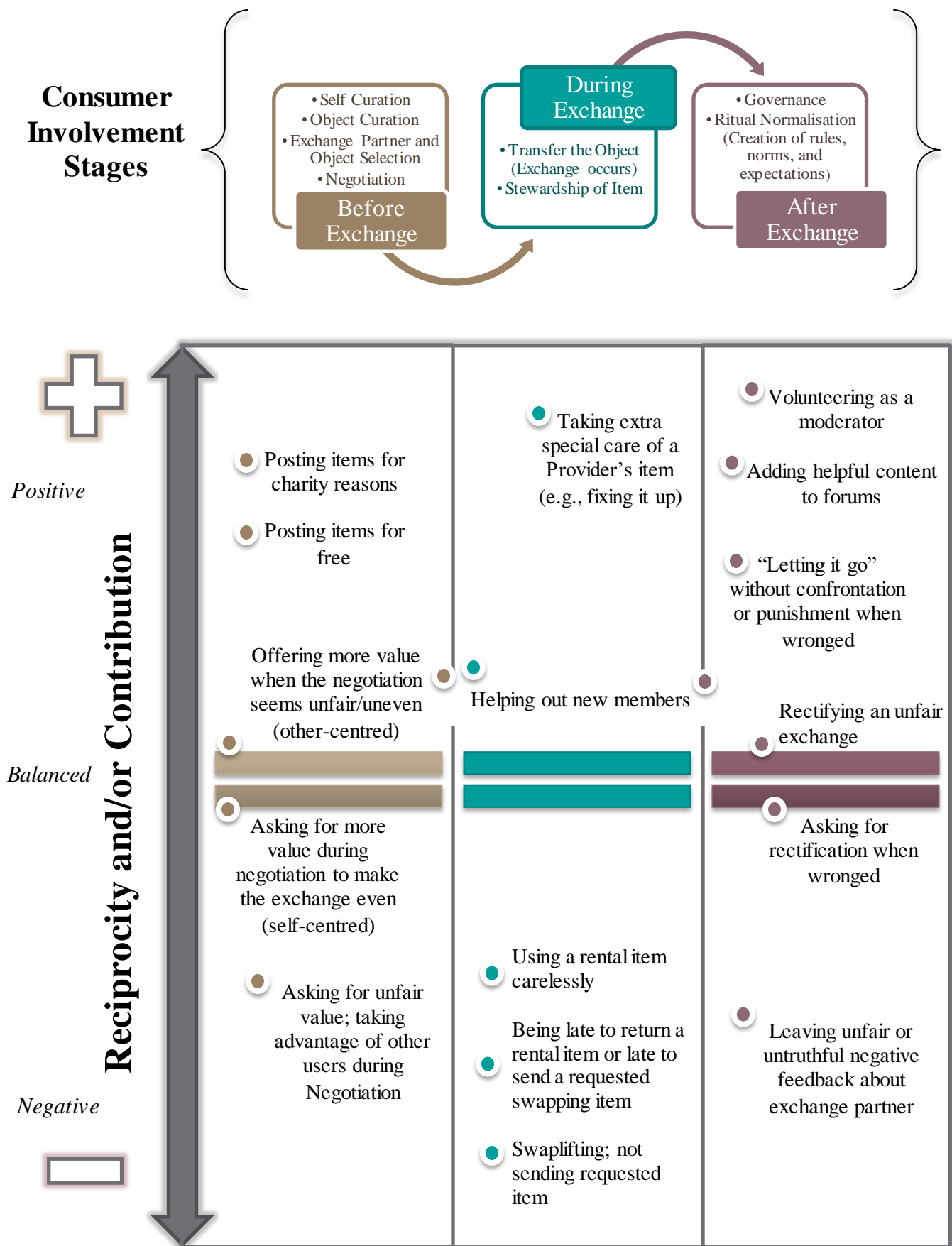
<sup>113</sup> “A feature such as the expectation of return says something about the *spirit of the exchange* [emphasis added], about its disinterestedness, the impersonality, the compassion” (Sahlins, 1973, p. 192).

**Figure 4.14** Example of Balanced Reciprocity applied to Equity Theory.**Figure 4.15** Example of Positive/Negative Reciprocity applied to Equity Theory.

Taking the Formalist economical perspective guided by rational-choice theories (e.g., Abell, 1991; Becker, 1974), perceptions of fairness are assumed to be self-centred (i.e., biased toward negative reciprocity). However, previous research has also supported the Substantivist perspective, showing existence of altruistic behaviour guided by positive reciprocity (e.g., Andreoni & Miller, 2000). There is also evidence consumers would prefer a more balanced, rather than self-interested, interaction, especially when exchange partners transition from one-shot to repeat interactions over time (e.g., Gächter & Falk, 1999). Further, Takers may try to avoid positive reciprocity because they have an aversion to being seen as a “charity case” (e.g., Burns et al., 2004; Williams, 2008). Overall, I found evidence of users trying to balance out the exchange from both a self-centred and other-centred approach (to be discussed in Section 4.6.1).

Similar to the “Community Membership Life Cycle” introduced by Cheung et al. (2005, p. 85), I also suggest Market Mediation can be explained by looking at a user’s nature of contribution to the exchange and website itself, which, like reciprocity, can also be split into a three-point spectrum: (1) Positive contribution, characterised by a user who adds useful content or contribution to the website/community, such as a moderator or person who comments and gives advice/feedback on forums; (2) Negative contribution, characterised by a user who adds negative or unwanted content to the website/community, such as an online “troll,” advertiser, or manipulator; and (3) Neutral or balanced contribution, characterised by a user who does not add anything to the community, such as a lurker or non-user. Inspired by Cheung et al’s diagram of users with positive and negative contribution throughout four stages of community membership (2005, p. 85), I created a conceptual map of reciprocity and contribution applied to the three main stages of “Consumer Involvement” as perceived by swapping and renting respondents (see **Figure 4.16**). These examples are discussed in the next three sections.

The dimension of “Market Mediation” helps explain the grey areas of reciprocity and contribution within swapping and renting exchange, and these are briefly discussed in the next three sections: **Balanced reciprocity/contribution** (4.6.1), **Negative reciprocity/contribution** (4.6.2), and **Positive (Generalised) reciprocity/contribution** (4.6.3).

**Figure 4.16** A Conceptual Map of Market Mediation applied to Stages of Consumer Involvement.



#### 4.6.1 Market Mediation:

### Balanced Reciprocity and Contribution

Balanced reciprocity became relevant to respondents when they compared *formal* and *informal* object transfers. Many respondents said they appreciated the website's terms and conditions which encouraged more balanced interactions throughout the stages of consumer involvement. For example, when I asked swapping user Corrine if she liked to share or swap with friends outside the website, she replied "a little bit," but then indicated informal sharing was not always fair (i.e., indicative of negative reciprocity and contribution) and preferred a more formal setting:

"I don't know, I'm very awkward at sharing. I like on the swap website, [...] that you like figure out a fair trade and you do it and everybody's happy, like, *it's a really nice formal way of doing it where everybody gets what they want.*"

Most respondents described balanced exchange relationships as their guiding motivation for renting and/or swapping. Rental Provider Ariel's recount of providing her clown costume depicts the typically desired rental exchange with a tit- "I got a fourteen-dollar discount off my original forty-dollar purchase," for a tat- "and she didn't really need to buy a costume, so it saved her money." Many rental Takers agreed with Ariel's balanced view as they believed temporary acquisition would save them money. For example, Rental Taker William expressed his preference for P2P over B2C rental models when he said 'it's cheaper than renting it off those rental places', while Leigh enjoyed renting, "because [she loved] saving money and [thought] it would be a great option to do so."

Rental Takers also believed their involvement benefitted the rental Provider, as rental Taker Bailey put it, "they can make money and you can save money." Bailey said she preferred to rent from peers (which she perceived as fair and balanced) rather than corporate (which she perceived as involving negative reciprocity): "I think it's because it's um, helping that other family out. I like my money to go to Australians."

Meanwhile, swapping users were also primarily focused on creating a fair and balanced exchange. For example, Amanda as a swapping Taker gave an example of trying to even out an exchange she thought was unfair to the Provider:

“I’ve given some girls like money for shipping cuz I don’t like to take advantage of people. I sent a girl a check, like 12 dollars extra or something ahead of time before shipping.”

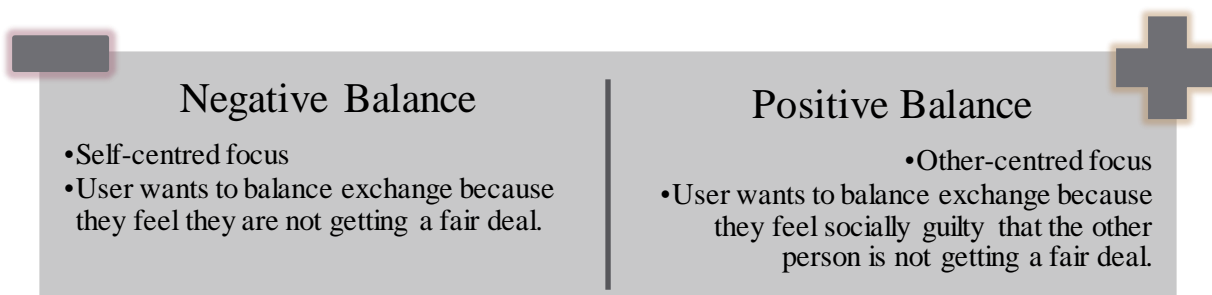
Swapping user Jillian shared similar experiences with regards to making an exchange fair in terms of shipping costs:

“One time [...] the other person really liked this one sweater I had but she herself said that she didn’t think it would be fair if I mailed her a sweater and she just mailed me a bottle of lotion [as extra] so that time it wasn’t me.

“And then this one other time I was mailing out a sweater but when she asked about it I said, ‘Can you mail me two items since the sweater would be kinda heavy?’ and she said it was fine, so usually it’s more of [...] whether I think it’s fair for either of us to trade.”

Amanda’s example differs from Jillian’s second example because Jillian perceived the unfairness toward herself, while Amanda felt it would be unfair to the other user. This motivational distinction between balancing the exchange shows how users gravitated toward positive and negative reciprocity, as shown in **Figure 4.17**.

**Figure 4.17** Motivations for a Balanced Exchange.



Another way balanced reciprocity became relevant to respondents was with *Governance*. For example, as first introduced in the “Anonymity” dimension (Section 4.5), Charlotte thought it was easier to achieve a balanced exchange by renting her belongings out to strangers as opposed to lending to friends because she was able to avoid the “dark side” of sharing which may cause tensions of obligation, frustration, or constraint (e.g., Bendapudi et al., 1996; Sherry et al., 1993; Ruth et al., 1999; Marcoux, 2009). Consider her thoughts on asking a P2P renting website user for rectification if something went wrong:

“With *friends and family*, I mean for me I wouldn’t want to even ask them to pay me back for anything, I’d probably just sort of winge about it for awhile secretly haha, but just for the sake of friendship and everything, I wouldn’t, you know, pursue it any further.

“If it is a *commercial transaction* then it’s very different [...] if it is a stranger you can sort of go, ‘Hey, you know this is going to cost me 80 bucks to fix and under the terms of the website or whatever, can you pay for that damage?!’”

Charlotte preferred having a commercial exchange guided by terms and conditions in order to achieve a fair experience. Bailey as a Desired rental Provider expressed a similar appreciation for renting out to users on a formal website as opposed to informally with friends:

“[The founder’s] been quite thorough with her regulations, with the bond, and the security, [...] Some things I probably wouldn’t rent to friends because I thought ‘well, you’re not going to ask them to pay for it if they break it,’ or that ‘there’s not a bond or something,’ so if you still wanted to make some money then that’s kind of a more sure way of, you know, it is a little bit conditional so that you don’t just break something and, ‘oh sorry’ sort of thing.”

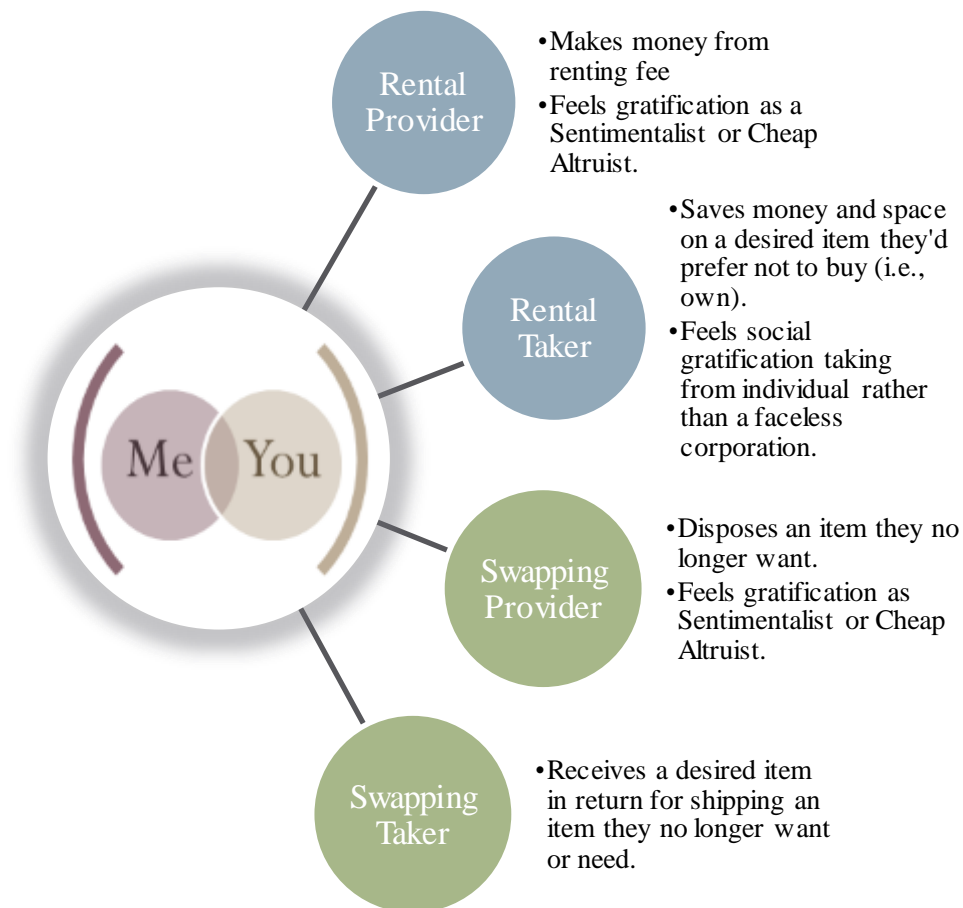
Meanwhile, Kelly compared swapping online to sharing with her friends and family:

“If I lend something to someone, I usually don’t always expect to get it back, like I’ve had a few friends that have liked it so much that they’ve kept it! you know, but I guess the thing with [swapping website] is like you know that you’re probably going to get something for it, whereas with friends it’s like you just give it to them, and you aren’t like ‘hey give me my whatever back.’”

As Charlotte, Bailey, and Kelly explained, the social pressures from Providing “In” were not usually a concern for swapping or rental respondents because relationships were more centrally mediated around the exchange (i.e., for money or for a traded object) as opposed to the relationship itself (i.e., for friendship). This finding was also supported by Jenkins et al’s (2014) study on borrowing, which revealed lenders often felt an aversion to sharing with friends because asking for rectification when an object was lost or damaged could ruin their relationship with the borrower. Further, Tinson and Nuttall (2007) found just because sharing was being conducted between sisters (as an example of close ties Providing “In”), product care did not always transpire. Thus, by Providing “Out” (i.e., anonymous swapping or renting guided by economic/self-interest), users were able to mitigate social tensions

indicative of friend-to-friend roles by adopting a more formal Provider-Taker relationship. See **Figure 4.18** for a summary of balanced reciprocity based on Provider and Taker perspectives.

**Figure 4.18** Summary of Provider and Taker Balanced Reciprocity.



Although most respondents were motivated to emulate a balanced exchange relationship (i.e., this was a common Desired Reality), this was not always met within their descriptions of Perceived and Actual Realities. Thus, in the next two sections I discuss how the exchange became imbalanced.

## 4.6.2 Market Mediation:

### Negative Reciprocity and Contribution

While many users perceived renting and swapping as balanced, others criticised the benefits for not matching their expectations. For example, Jack found most Provider opportunities weren't "going to be a worthwhile expenditure of [his] efforts as an online entrepreneur." The economic inclination to make a "profit" is where the lines of negative reciprocity appear, as "participants confront each other as opposed interests, each looking to maximize utility at the other's expense" (Sahlins, 1972, p. 195). Thus, one aspect of negative reciprocity came before the exchange during Object Curation and Negotiation, where self-focused users would ask for more value than what seemed fair and try to take advantage of other users.

Many rental respondents had witnessed several rental objects with similar price tags as their eBay counterparts, describing them as "too high and inflated." Providers preferred to veer away from everyday items because of this problem of negative reciprocity and only found the exchange "worth it" with "higher-ticket items." Meanwhile, Richard tried swapping his bottle of Jim Beam Bourbon which "was worth about 30, 35 dollars" but only received a swapping offer "worth 5 dollars" of which he was not interested and eventually "disposed of it in another way."

Further, Moore and Taylor's (2009) suggestion that expenditure and quality could remain equal on buying/renting models was found to be more idealistic than common in current market infrastructures. For example, Samuel discussed his dilemma of wanting a bike for a two-week holiday:

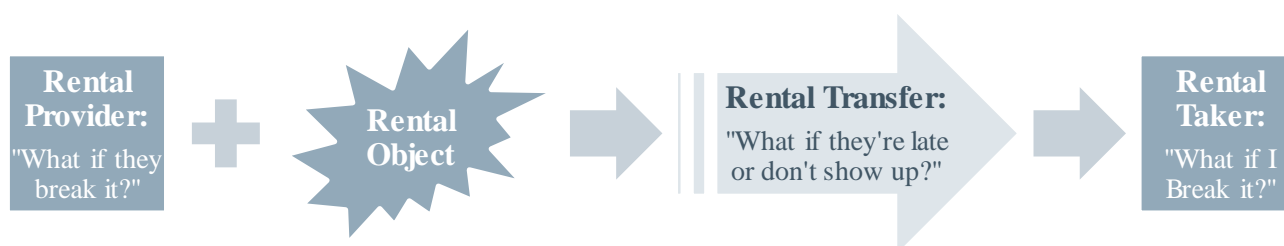
"I didn't find a bicycle rental within walking distance of the place that I was staying so I would need to take a taxi to the bike rental, and that just became so exceedingly expensive because once I added up the daily price of bike rental which was about 24 dollars, I would spend 48 dollars of bike rental for a weekend and 36 for a cab ride and well I bought a bike for 175 dollars, I'll abandon it at the end of my stay."

Anita echoed other users' observation that "nobody wants quality second hand because you can get new things to own for so cheap." Joel summed up the vast occurrence of inflated prices on P2P renting websites by giving his opinion that most Providers have "no idea of the value of borrowing a

drill” because “there’s been very little established for what is actually the real price and barter currency to work with,” adding an afterthought, “we just don’t do the math very well.”

Negative reciprocity also had to do with fears of being cheated or wronged. The most palpable concern for rental respondents was a fear of damage to the rented product (see **Figure 4.19**); where rental Providers asked almost unanimously, “What if they break it?” and equally concerned rental Takers asked on the other side of the exchange, “What if I break it?”. However, as originally discussed in the “Consumer Involvement” dimension (Section 4.3.5), rental users were more concerned about “risk” than “trust between strangers.” In other words, none of my rental respondents expressed concerns for *betrayal aversion* (e.g., Aimone & Houser, 2009; Bohnet, Herrmann, Zeckhauser, 2010; Fehr & Fischbacher, 2003; Hong & Bohnet, 2007) to being cheated by others; rather, they feared having something go wrong out of bad luck or unforeseen circumstances. This may be because no rental respondents had heard or experienced first-hand negative reciprocity occurring in P2P renting.

**Figure 4.19** Rental Respondent Concerns of Negative Reciprocity



Alternatively, many swapping respondents *had* heard about others being wronged and/or had been *personally* swaplifted, echoing Natalia’s belief that “when you swap with a stranger [...] you don’t actually know that you will get something in return,” and showing a cautious distrust of other users. Previous research has shown people to be less willing to trust after being exposed to unsuccessful interactions in the past (e.g., Brehm & Rahn, 1997), so this may be a reason why swapping respondents were more often concerned with being cheated than rental respondents.

When it came to “Indirect Swapping” websites, the roles between swapping Provider and Taker were clearly separate – a Taker would request an object from a Provider using a virtual point, and the Provider would send their item once the point had transferred into their account. Alternatively, Direct Swapping websites usually encouraged simultaneous roles from the Provider and Taker. For example, when the swapping users were equally experienced (i.e., similar feedback) then both users shipped their item at the same time. However, recall from the “Consumer Involvement” dimension how swapping normalisation dictated the least experienced swapping respondent (i.e., with less feedback)

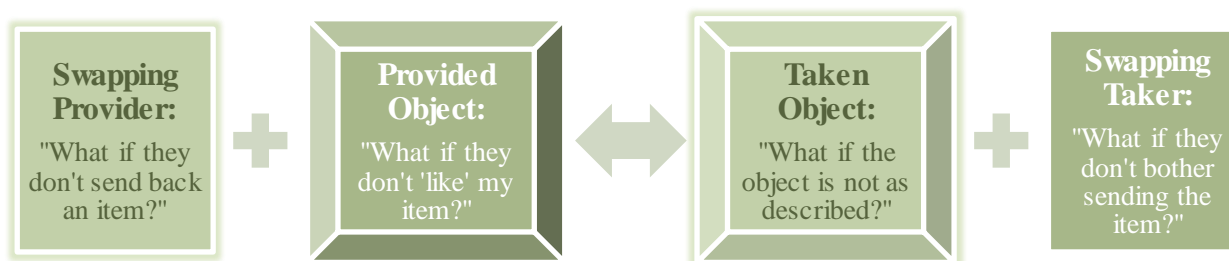
had to ship their item first. Here, the less experienced swapper can be categorised as the Provider because they had to provide their item first and therefore had the most risk. This makes the more experienced swapper akin to a Taker because they were not required to send their item until receiving an item from the Provider. With these differences in mind, the main concerns swapping Providers and Takers had for negative reciprocity are illustrated in **Figure 4.20**.

**Swapping Provider Concerns:** The most palpable concern for swapping Providers was theft, with many respondents expressing a fear their provided object would not be reciprocated with the question, “What if I get swaplified?”. Swapping Providers also faced the risk of the Taker requesting an exchange (i.e., swap reversal). Rose gave an example:

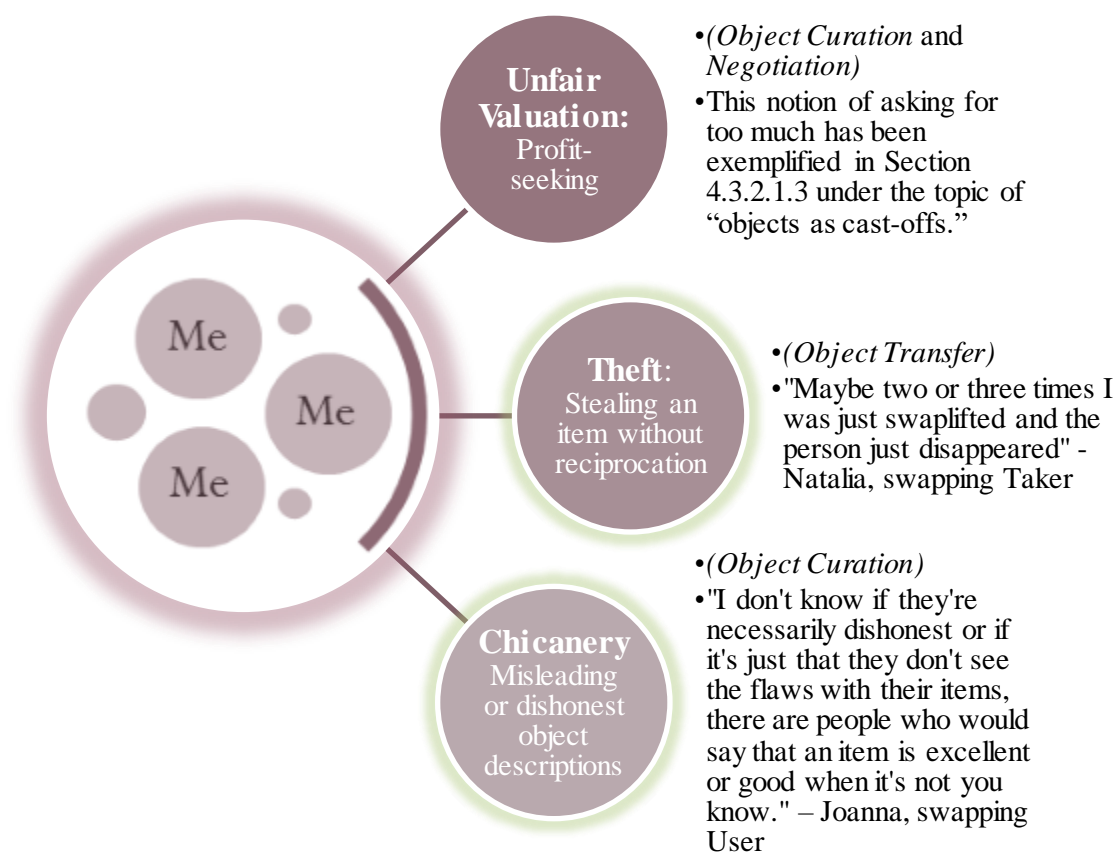
“The stuff that I sent [...] they didn’t like it and they returned it to me. So well my problem was that ever since that happened, I told them that there is no returning, because it’s not fair because I have to pay the shipping on it and if the person decided that they don’t like it and they just cancelled the trade and sent it back to me, so my policy on that is that I won’t accept returned items.”

**Swapping Taker Concerns:** Unlike rental respondents who did not express any concerns about the rental object being incorrectly described, the most palpable concern for swapping Takers was whether the quality of the swapping object was being honestly portrayed (i.e., “What if their item is not what I expected?”). Swapping Takers also faced the risk of vacillation from the Provider making the exchange fall through and be a waste of time (i.e., “What if they don’t bother sending me the item?”). However, unlike rental Takers who usually required an item for a specific purpose within a limited timeframe (and therefore perceived commitment to the exchange as a necessity), most swapping Takers considered cancelled transactions from the Provider as Joanna put it, “not a big deal.”

**Figure 4.20** Swapping Respondent Concerns for Negative Reciprocity.



This concludes the main concerns held by Providers and Takers of negative reciprocity, which are summarised in **Figure 4.21**.

**Figure 4.21** Examples of Negative Reciprocity Concerns.

Although most rental respondents had varying fears of negative reciprocity (i.e., this was a common Perceived Reality), none had heard about or experienced first-hand any of these risks coming to fruition (i.e., Actual Reality). As discussed in the “Anonymity” dimension (Section 4.5), because the exchange had to be done face-to-face, social norms may have influenced rental users to exhibit less selfish interactions when not under the cloak of anonymity. Alternatively, because swapping transactions were conducted entirely online,<sup>114</sup> opportunities and instances of exploiting the swapping commons were commonplace. However, as discussed in the “Temporality” dimension (Section 4.4), swapping users were heavily involved, so would eventually discover favourite trading partners with who they could repeatedly trade (and thus avoid riskier transactions).

The face-to-face meetings of P2P renting and repeat transactions of swapping also provided opportunities for generalised reciprocity to emerge as self-interested strangers started to become “friends.” Thus, I now explore how the exchange tilted toward a positive balance.

<sup>114</sup> Except in the circumstances where the swapping users realised they lived close enough to deliver the item in person, which occurred with one of my respondents from New Zealand.



### 4.6.3 Market Mediation:

## Positive (Generalised) Reciprocity and Contribution

When encouraged to share their favourite stories of renting and swapping, users offered experiences of positive reciprocity and contribution. Some Providers found it to be an outlet for altruistic behaviour, saying they often gave things away, and disposition was another way to achieve gratification from providing others with an object which would otherwise be unattainable to the Taker. As exemplified in the Type of Transferred Object dimension (Section 4.2.2.2.2), this perception was mostly born out of “Cheap Altruism” and “Sentimentalism.” Swapping user Natalia gave an example:

“Probably more than a handful of times, I’ve messaged somebody like a request and they didn’t see anything of mine but they’ll just say they’ve had the item for so long and they’d really like appreciate that someone would get use out of it and they’d just send it to me for nothing.”

After repeating rental and swapping transactions with the same person, many swapping and rental Providers agreed they’d become more willing to give or lend out their item for free as the line between formal market mediation and informal sharing became blurred. Charlotte explained on renting, “that’s when you know you sort of passed that line and you’ve gone from a commercial friendly relationship to best buddies or whatever.” Similarly, Joanna explained for swapping:

“When you start to build a rapport with somebody, like sometimes they will like go above and beyond to send you like extra things, like nice things, or even things that they know you like, [...] I mean that’s kind of special, it’s something that you would do as a friend that you have in person.”

This interpersonal closeness posed challenges for CC websites as once people started to “give it away for free” as friends, many stopped using the website (to avoid hassle and/or fees) and contacted each other directly. For example, Kelly as a swapping key informant told me in correspondence after our interview (about 6 months later) she had stopped using the swapping websites and started a Facebook group with her favourite swapping users. Meanwhile, rental key informant Tara explained her website’s newsletters included want ads and contact information, which sometimes led some users to avoid the system:

“We also know that people are avoiding our system, if someone has got on the wanted ad and someone is happy to lend it to that person for free they just don’t bother putting it on our system and they just message the person direct and avoid our service which is annoying for us.”

Rental founders Lynne and Wade were also aware of such problems (i.e., Leaky User Retention), and discussed strategies to deter users from leaving their website, reminding users of their website’s security and community mechanisms.

Another type of positive reciprocity occurred with swapping users who said they often received or provided extra objects (i.e., “freebies”) when swapping with their favourite Takers. Consider the following examples:

Rose: “There have been times when I get more than the trade, like they put in extra items for me, like they just put in a small necklace or some small you know, things like that, like a freebie they call it, so that’s exciting you know, that’s an extra gift, it’s a good thing, and sometimes I get a note, sometimes they have a card saying ‘thanks for swapping with me and I hope you like the item’ so that kind of thing is pretty sweet.”

Alicia: “One swapper that I usually get magazines from quite often she’s put in extra magazines, and I’ve done the same for her when she’s swapped books with me.”

However, when I asked respondents *why* they were compelled to give items away for free, generalised reciprocity was shown to be unstable and out of reach, as swapping users said they usually gave freebies for self-interested or balanced reasons, such as to:

### **Purge, get rid of stuff:**

“What people will typically you know send in extra for a swap it will be something a little bit generic, it’s not necessarily something that I asked for, um, this one girl was really sweet she sent you know a shirt, but the shirt didn’t really fit me, *I think she was just trying to purge.*” – Sarah

“*If I’m cleaning out stuff* and find scarves that I don’t wear anymore [...] then I’ll think ‘oh they might be able to use that’ so it’s just if I find something that I think they might like.” – Kelly

**Reward favourite swapping users (i.e., build a rapport):**

“With people I swap most, you know all the time, I’ll do it [...] *If they’re easy with negotiating with the trade.*” – Rose

“Kinda makes the relationship a bit nicer because you feel this, this relationship with the person *because they helped you out* a little bit more so that’s nice” – Clarissa

**Increase credibility and congruity as an act of *Self Curation*:**

“That *looks good also on your page*, to be like, ‘hey I’ll give you stuff for free if you’re cool!’” – Corrine

**Gain leverage for negotiating a better quality swapping object:**

“If I have like, if I get perfume samples or if I find myself with a little bit of candy, I’ll throw that in *as like an incentive.*” – Sarah

Looking at “Freebies” as gifts, it is important to consider that people *exchange* gifts rather than give gifts without any expectation of return; even if the return is not measurable, or just an intrinsic feeling of gratification. Although swapping Providers were sometimes intrinsically altruistic with their decision to give freebies, as Clarissa exemplified:

“If I give somebody something, like a small gift and I don’t get one back, that’s okay with me, because that was my choice to do it, I just did that to be nice, you know they would do that to be nice in my opinion and it’s not really something I expect or expected, *it’s just something you do nice because you feel like it.*”

Clarissa also hoped the Taker would say “a little ‘I appreciate it, thank you.’”

Many swappers had normalised “freebies” as gifts to be later reciprocated. For example, Joanna said if she received a freebie she “always” sent a freebie back. Meanwhile, Corrine complained how her experience became tainted after giving a freebie (example quote can be found in Section 4.2.2.2.2):

“Every time I felt worse and worse about it. [...explains freebie...] and she was like ‘ahh cool’ [...] but I think that might have coloured my experience with her a little bit *because she never reciprocated the action* like even though I’d started off the swapping with her on this really generous swap she was always super greedy so I didn’t like that.”

Although most rental Providers from my study did not usually lend out items for free, many expressed altruistic inclinations. For example, two-way rental user Charlotte said “generally, I’d be more than happy to rent it out for free, but if I can make a few dollars, yeah that’s fine too,” while rental Provider Anita said she wasn’t motivated by money but instead to share because “for the effort involved, you really don’t make a lot of money anyway.”

Another opportunity for positive reciprocity emerged when two rental websites allowed Providers to rent out their items offer the proceeds to a chosen charity or fundraiser. This was a popular payment option (renting website founder Tara said 49% of their transactions so far had been for charity) and also well-accepted among respondents. For example, Martin loved how Providers could enjoy being philanthropic without costs, saying he thought it was “pretty cool because that would be money you wouldn’t normally be earning.” Meanwhile, rental Takers were able to foster a “feel-good” attitude in their usage purchase, as Leigh thought it was “a brilliant idea since most people are way more willing to spend money as long as they can feel like a better person for doing it.” Further, some rental Takers gained a sense of *Political Consumerism* (discussed in Section 4.7). For example, as a Desired user entrepreneur and politically motivated consumer, Ariel relayed her plans on making her own CC rental/swapping website with a charity feature which could “make a little difference to others” in addressing “problems with the world.”

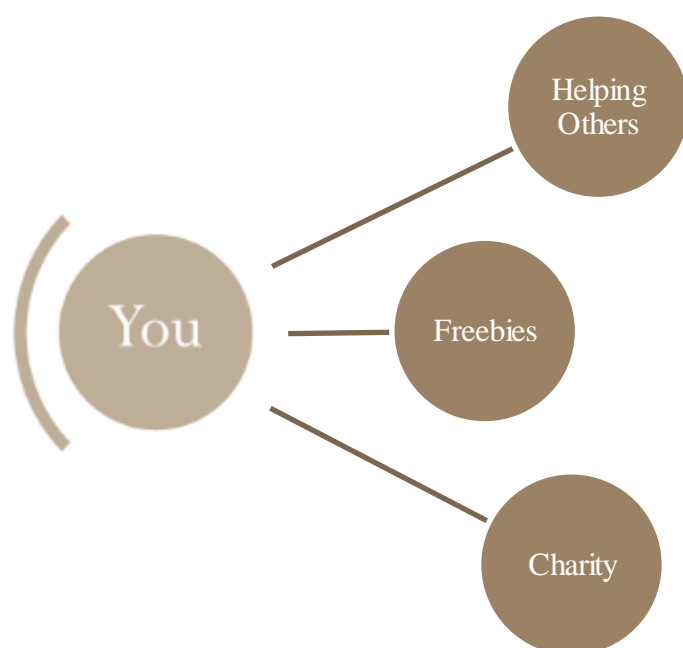
Many respondents thought sellers should always provide goods in sound condition, emphasising the tit-for-tat mentality of a fair deal. For example, recall from Section 4.3.2.2 how Samuel said if he was going to rent out a bike he would want to make sure it was “all tarted up” before listing. This perception that he needed to make sure his items were in top-notch condition was found to be misguided for P2P renting situations which became blurred with positive reciprocity and contribution. For example, Tara as a P2P renting founder relayed a “sweet story” she heard from one of her users:

“There was a guy who had sent a message to borrow somebody’s car-top box, and the lender came back with a message which said ‘I’m really sorry, but a couple of weeks ago my four-year-old son jumped on it and it’s cracked so I’m really sorry but it’s now broken.’ So he came back saying ‘don’t worry, I’ll rent it anyway, I’ll fix it’ and so he basically borrowed it, fixed it, used it, and returned it.”

Other examples of other-centred “helping” behaviour included rental respondents offering assistance on how to fix a game system and teaching the owner how to work their gramophone. Such experiences were discussed as benefits by many respondents when comparing renting from peers to businesses.

Also recall from Section 4.3.5 how swapping respondents offered each other guidance and feedback throughout the exchange (e.g., Sarah reaching out to new members, Kelly volunteering as a moderator). These are examples of positive contribution during the stages of *Object Curation*, *Ritual Normalisation* and *Governance*. This concludes the instances where Providers and Takers engaged in positive reciprocity and contribution, as summarised in **Figure 4.22**.

**Figure 4.22** Examples of Positive Reciprocity and Contribution.



Overall, the numerous occasions of positive and negative imbalance seem to support Sahlin's (1972, p. 223) "demur" that although the classical definition of exchange strives for equilibrium, balanced reciprocity is "inherently unstable," as "on one hand, a series of honourably balanced dealings between comparatively distant parties builds trust and confidence" and reduces social distance (causing generalised reciprocity), while "on the other hand, a renege acts to sever relations – as failure to make returns breaks a trade partnership" (causing negative reciprocity).

The CC economy has ubiquitously claimed divergence from the capitalist market by calling itself a "sharing economy." However, my findings suggest swapping and renting (as CC examples) belong more to a hybrid economy, nuanced with a mix of altruistic, self-centred, and fair-minded motivations. Like Sahlin (1972), I would therefore argue the "sharing economy" (as a form of generalised reciprocity) is just as "inherently unstable" as balanced reciprocity. Just as *commercial relationships* (i.e., guided by economically balanced or negative reciprocity) repeatedly encroach upon informal/not-

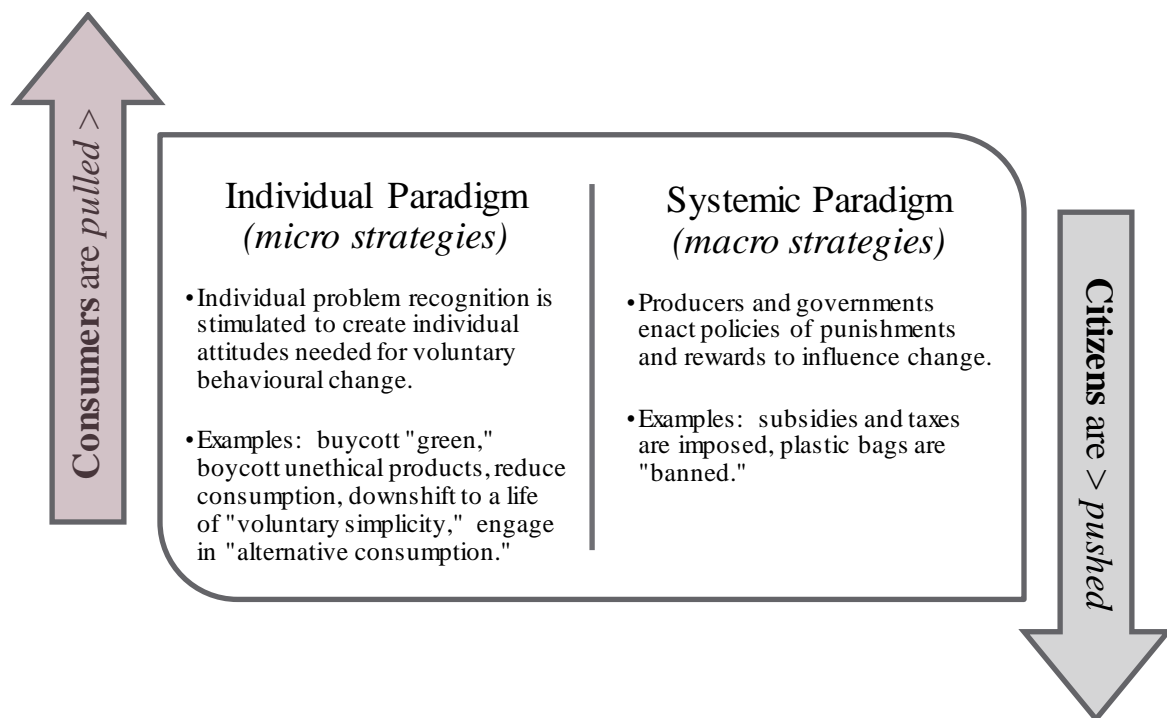
for-profit consumptionscapes, *personal relationships* (i.e., guided by socially balanced or positive reciprocity) can likewise enter the world of formal/profit-oriented consumptionscapes as Anonymity lessens and Providers and Takers become more socially invested.

This concludes the “Market Mediation” dimension (i.e., the referential question of “why”). I now turn to the final section of this chapter with an exploration of *why* respondents engaged in renting and swapping through “Political Consumerism.”

## 4.7 Political Consumerism

To better understand the context of *Political Consumerism*, it first helps to revisit the agency-structure problem (introduced in Section 3.1.1.2), where scholars debate over the merits of constructionism versus determinism as conduits for change. Spaargaren (2011, p. 814) distinguished between the individualist and systemic paradigm which, as I have illustrated in **Figure 4.23**, can also differentiate between “consumers” and “citizens” (e.g., Jacobsen & Dulsrud, 2007; Johnston, 2008; Soper, 2007): (1) **Consumers** are constructionally *pulled* into making ethical decisions by marketing messages of persuasion, whereas (2) **Citizens** are deterministically *pushed* into making decisions by enforcing laws and regulations that drive them to consume, and/or produce ethical products. This push-pull distinction reveals a variance in “power” – the individual paradigm places the capacity for change from within the private consumer (i.e., “constructionism”), whereas the systemic paradigm designates the power of change to fall on authorities of society (i.e., “determinism”). Realistically, these strategies are not either/or, but rather mixed in a complex mesh of activities that reside in a “bottomless swamp” of power, influence, and interdependence (Dahl, 1957, p. 201).

**Figure 4.23** Agency-Structure Paradigms for the Politics of Consumption.



*Political Consumerism*<sup>115</sup> is the growing phenomenon of politics being guided by markets which encourage consumers to “vote with their dollar” and it is thus a micro strategy from the individualist paradigm:

“It represents actions by people who make choices among producers and products with the goal of changing objectionable institutional or market practices. [...] Political consumers are the people who engage in such choice situations. They may act individually or collectively.” (Micheletti, 2003, p. 2).

When a collective proliferation of individuals become politically involved with their everyday consumption, the paradigm ideally mobilises systemic powers which catalyse a deterministic impact (e.g., Merlucci, 1988). In other words, “when aggregated, these individual choices have the potential to transcend the actions of individuals to form political movements that may, in turn, challenge political and economic powers” (Jacobsen & Dulsrud, 2007, p. 471). However, political consumerists are usually “less organised, less structured, and more transient than conventional political participation” (Stolle et al., 2005, p. 252).

Studies on political consumerism (e.g., Baek, 2010; Neilson, 2010; Yates, 2011) typically focus on two approaches: (1) **Positive consumption**, where consumers reward ethical practices by selective shopping (e.g., boycott, buying local products, buying “green” or “fairtrade”) and (2) **Negative consumption** – where consumers punish unethical practices by taking away their consumption (e.g., boycott, market avoidance).

While this overarching distinction is useful, the boycott-buycott strategies focus mostly on the first-cycle of products where consumers are told to “vote with their shopping carts” rather than on alternative or resistant practices such as reuse of products in the second-hand world. However, other studies suggest broadening the scope to include alternative acts of consumption such as voluntary simplicity as a rejection of overconsumption (e.g., Cherrier, 2009b; Zamwel, Sasson-Levy, & Ben-Porat, 2014), grassroots community-based contexts such as community gardens (Chatzidakis, Marclaran, & Bradshaw, 2012), and access-based consumption as an alternative to ownership (Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2010). Voluntary simplicity in its purest form (i.e., more extreme) can be considered as an example of negative consumption because it *rejects* mainstream consumption for a “better” alternative of thrift (i.e., consumption is *reduced* as a better alternative). Meanwhile the case of grassroots gardens

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115 Similarly referred to as “Ethical Consumerism” (e.g., Auger et al., 2003; Belk et al., 2005; Carrington, Neville, & Whitwell, 2012), “Ethical Consumption” (e.g., Eckhardt, Belk, & Devinney, 2010), “Sustainable Consumption,” and “Critical Consumption.”



and access over ownership are examples of positive consumption because they try to find alternatives *within* mainstream consumption (i.e., consumption is *selective* to better alternatives).

Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) hypothesised Zipcar users to be motivated by a political “strategy to articulate and promote their ideological interests to society, business, and government” (p. 885). Conversely, they found users were *not* motivated by ethical concerns (even though Zipcar had heavily used environmentalism and sustainability in their marketing approach), but rather were predominantly motivated by a desire for convenience and savings (thus, their final verdict pointed at “low political consumerism”). Similarly, Moeller and Wittkowski’s (2010) study on the burdens of ownership found environmentalism had no significant influence on a person’s preference for renting and Lamberton and Rose (2012) found commercial sharing systems were only motivated by individual rather than political values. However, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) *did* suggest grassroots P2P types of access-based consumption were ripe for exploration as applied to political consumerism.

From my preliminary literature review, I was aware of ethical values being potential drivers for engaging in Collaborative Consumption. For example, Lawson (2011) found environmentalism to be a prominent reason for renting cars and Ozanne and Ozanne (2011) found anti-materialism to be an important value for parents in toy libraries. During my interviews I was therefore prepared to ask consumers vaguely, “What are your thoughts on [sustainability/materialism/consumerism...etc.] and [swapping/renting]?” However, for many of my interviews I did not *need* to ask this question because the respondent had already unpromptedly brought it up when I asked them other general questions (e.g., “What is your favourite aspect of [swapping/renting]?”).<sup>116</sup> Overall, my reading of Bardhi and Eckhardt’s (2012) findings suggests there were *no* perceived instances of political consumerism for Zipcar users, however my interviews suggested such values *were* relevant factors to at least some swapping and renting users.

An important question thus remains to be answered: *Were* swapping and renting respondents actually motivated by “political consumerism” (i.e., *what* constitutes an act of consumption as politically motivated)?

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116 This was mostly the case for P2P renting respondents, however a few swapping respondents unpromptedly brought it up in conversation as well. This disclosure of unprompted discussions may help address concerns for social desirability bias (e.g., Auger & Devinney, 2007; Carrigan & Attalla, 2001), as Watson (2008, p. 8) explained, “it appears that if people are asked about the environment they will voice strong concern. If, however, they are talked with about why they buy reused goods, the environment will figure considerably less prominently, if at all.” The differences between prompted and unprompted consumers are exemplified in Section 4.7.2.

Due to the mixture of political actions being chaotically mixed into a web of everyday acts, some scholars (e.g., Stolle, Hooghe, & Micheletti, 2005) have noted the difficulties in determining whether a consumption act is motivated by political concerns (as opposed to private concerns of consummation). For example, Bardhi and Eckhardt (2012) said bike-sharing programmes could be politically motivated to reduce car ownership as a solution to environmental concerns, whereas other access-based examples such as Rent the Runway and eBook rentals were more likely non-politically motivated to fill a gap in the market. However, *some* consumers could be using such access-based examples as a protest to the perception we live in a throwaway society. So, where should we draw the line (i.e., what makes a behaviour political)? And, do we *need* to draw a line (i.e., is this distinction important)?

Stolle and Hooghe (2003) addressed this issue by introducing three conditions for a consumption act to be considered political: (1) **Behaviour** – the consumer is *actually* boycotting, boycotting, or engaging in alternative forms of consumption as opposed to just considering the behaviour; (2) **Motivation** – the consumer is *aware* of a political problem, is motivated by that problem, and/or *believes* their consumption can help address that problem; and (3) **Frequency** – the act is a regular commitment rather than a random one-time or sporadic event.

The first and second conditions of “Motivation” and “Behaviour” seem to be the most prominently used criteria in the literature, with many scholars requiring the consumption act to at least be guided from a desire to influence or change society (Anderson & Tobiasen, 2006) that goes “beyond self-interest” (Pellizzoni, 2011, p. 221). In other words, political consumerism should be considered as “both an activity and an attitude” (Cherrier, 2009b, p. 181). Pellizzoni (2011, p. 222) also said political consumption involved “choices made by considering the consequences of others,” however, I think this is too restrictive because it focuses only on social concerns. For example, a consumer may be politically motivated about the environment not because they are concerned with future generations, but because they are intrinsically motivated to care for the Earth and can’t stand to see negative consequences of consumption such as pollution and forest degradation. Finally, the behaviour does not have to be *successful* at addressing the problem – the consumer only has to *perceive* their behaviour could have an impact.

Applying these conditions to my interviews revealed varying degrees of political concern guiding respondents to swap or rent. I found these “Motivations” rested on at least two main considerations: (1) **Political Desire to Participate** could be founded on *Intrinsic and/or Extrinsic motivations*, as well as focused on *Product-oriented versus Process-oriented concerns*; and (2) **Level of Involvement and Importance** could range from *Passive to Active*, where a person’s Level of Resistance could range

from *Alternative-consumerism* to *Anti-consumerism*, (i.e., acts of resistance range from “positive consumerism” to “negative consumerism”).

(1) The **Political Desire to Participate** consideration explains the *nature* of a person’s political concern (similarly, see Follesdal, 2004; Klintman, 2004, pp. 81-84) and is defined in **Table 4.6** and discussed in Section 4.7.1.

(2) The *Level of Involvement and Importance* consideration measures the *strength* of a person’s political concern and is defined and discussed in Section 4.7.2.

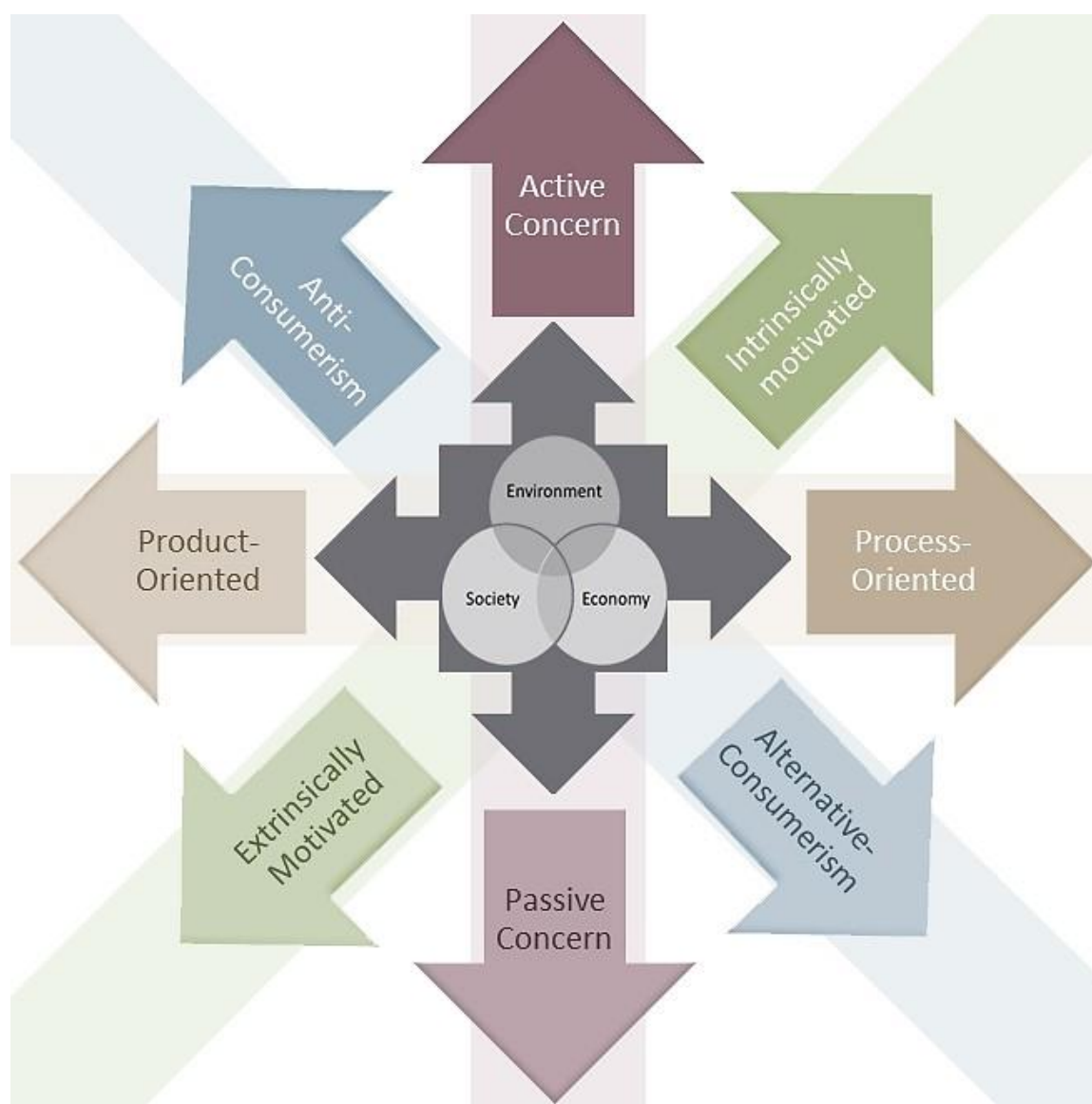
**Table 4.6** Political Desires to Participate: Product-Process and Intrinsic-Extrinsic.

		(2) <i>Level of Involvement and Importance</i>	
		<i>Active or Passive Concern</i>	<i>Alternative versus Anti-consumption</i>
(1) Political Desire to Participate	Process-oriented	Political concern is based on the biography of a product (i.e., its lifecycle from resource to commodity) rather than the product itself.	
	Product-oriented	Political concern is based on the product itself in the context of its usage (e.g., a belief that cars take up too much of our public spaces may lead consumers to selectively choose alternatives such as walking, bicycling or public transportation). For example, some rental Takers were interested in being able to afford products that were more environmentally sustainable.	
	Intrinsic Desire	The political concern is driven from an intrinsic, fundamental value (e.g., altruism, thrift) or natural aversion to something (e.g., wastefulness) held by the consumer. This value/aversion is held regardless of what “others” think, regardless of its actual impact on “others,” and regardless of its actual impact on the environment, society, or the economy. Thus, it is intrinsic to the <i>political concern</i> (rather than to the <i>political activity</i> of swapping/renting).	
	Extrinsic Desire	The consumer is motivated to make an impact and create actual change (i.e., reduce unethical practices, reduce ecological footprint), concerned about the effect their consumption has on other individuals (e.g., whether future generations will have access to natural resources), motivated to receive rewards (e.g., social praise for being environmentally savvy) and/or to avoid punishment from others (e.g., social ostracism for being wasteful).	

By intersecting these four continuums on a multi-layered conceptual map (see **Figure 4.24**), political consumers can be placed into different clusters. For example, using the *Level of Involvement* consideration, the more radical groups (presiding on the upper left) had a more active concern and/or engaged in anti-consumption, while more moderate groups (on the lower right) had more of a passive concern and/or engaged in alternative-consumption.

Since a consumer's *Political Desire to Participate* is not mutually exclusive (i.e., they can be both extrinsically and intrinsically motivated, as well as product and process oriented rather than either/or), the third and fourth axes should be looked at as proportions, where for example, a person placed in the middle axis was equally motivated by extrinsic and intrinsic factors, whereas a person placed in the upper right placed more importance on intrinsic factors.

**Figure 4.24** A Conceptual Map of Political Consumerism.



### 4.7.1 Political Consumerism:

## Types of Concerns and Political Desires to Participate

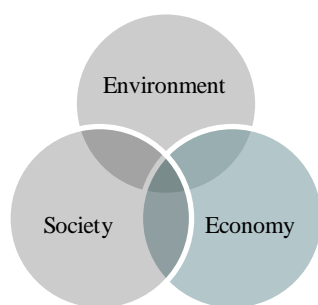
Yates (2011, p. 195) criticised the political consumerism literature with the observation that “few authors have discussed [...] what critical consumers are critical *about*.” This problem is addressed at the midpoint of **Figure 4.24**, which shows three political pillars driving consumers in their everyday consumption: (1) *Economic* concerns for stability/growth of the economy and opportunity for employment, (2) *Societal* concerns for standard of living, community, education, and emotional wellbeing of citizens; and/or (3) *Environmental* concerns for sustaining natural resources, wildlife, and a pollution-free environment. These concerns are not mutually exclusive and are likely to overlap (thus displayed as a Venn diagram).

I borrowed these terms from the literature on sustainability, which has frequently promoted a three-sector separation model concerned with sustaining a healthy economy, environment, and society (e.g., Costanza & Patten, 1995; Elkington, 1997; Hardi & Zdan, 1997). Giddings, Hopwood, and O’Brien (2002) criticised this model for assuming separation between the three categories, saying, “the reality of life today is that the economy dominates environment and society.” They proposed a more embedded bullseye model where the economy (nested at the centre) is dependent on society, which is dependent on the environment. Because my ontological belief agrees the natural environment can exist without society (Lovelock, 1988), I partially<sup>117</sup> agree with this renovation as a more accurate representation of Structural ontological depth. However, the Venn diagram I have depicted should not be seen as a static representation of *one* Reality. Rather, it should be considered from the *various* layers of reality I discussed in Chapter Three (i.e., Desired, Actual, Perceived, and Structural). Further, it should be looked at from both individual and collective angles. From these different perspectives, the model transforms itself (i.e., categories can grow to different proportions, be partially or completely eclipsed, embedded within each other, and/or separated) to the circumstances. These concerns are explored and applied to the context of renting and swapping in the next three sections, beginning with concerns for the *Economy*.

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117 Giddings et al., (2002, p. 191) argued that “society for many people did and still does (although under siege) exist without the economy.” Because “society” and “economy” are interconnected and messy terms, my opinion on this matter would need to be supported and researched beyond the scope and level of this thesis. In brief and at first glance, I am concerned with the definition of “economy” and what that really means. For example, if I defined “economy” using reciprocity, I would already be apt to reject this proposal because I don’t believe society can exist without any form of reciprocity (i.e., giving and receiving; supply and demand).

### 4.7.1.1 Economic Concerns



*Economic* concerns focus on a society's production and consumption of resources (i.e., wealth and commodities).

For financially successful CC companies, examples of political concern for the economy have been numerous in both the popular press and economics literature. For example, CC companies like Airbnb and Uber have been criticised for generating unfair competition, destroying labour rights and enabling tax avoidance (e.g., Leonard, 2014; Ranchordas, 2015; Slee, 2014).

Consumers have also voiced their fears that reduced consumption in the first-hand cycle could affect job stability because the decreased demand for new commodities would coincide with the termination of production workers (e.g., Herbst, 2014). I was cognisant of these views during my interviews, but none of my respondents found the economy as a relevant negative concern in regards to swapping/renting. Neither did they think swapping/renting could offer a boost to the collective economy. Perhaps this is because swapping/renting websites were not financially successful and thus perceived as unlikely to have a detrimental effect to the economy; or perhaps it was not a valid concern for my respondents.

However, Tim, as a Desired two-way rental user, expressed a concern for building an economy of innovation through P2P networks. For example, after referring to himself as “a techie,” he expressed a desire to see businesses incorporate more technological innovations. This represents a positive<sup>118</sup> political consumerism example because Tim perceived his selective participation as supporting an economic initiative he wanted to see come to fruition.

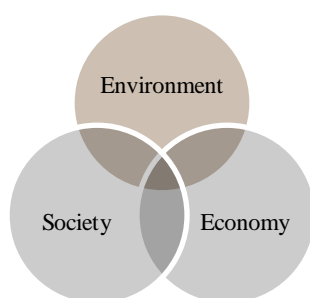
Although many rental and swapping respondents *were* critical about inefficiencies in the current economy when it came to perceptions of “planned obsolescence” in production (e.g., Bailey as a rental Taker said renting was her “little bit about decreasing the demand so they don’t keep pumping out all these goods that just break”), “hyper-consumption” (e.g., rental Provider Jack said economic growth

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<sup>118</sup> Political consumerism (e.g., Baek, 2010; Neilson, 2010; Yates, 2011) can be positive (i.e., to reward ethical/ideal consumption practices) or negative (i.e., to rebel and punish unethical consumption practices).

and “expansion isn’t necessarily a good thing as a people,” saying, “somebody just needs to come to the market with a better way to do things”), and “globalisation” (e.g., Jack also said he was “not cool with globalism” and wanted to find ways to reduce the “incredible demand that American makes” and reduce “all these outsourcing problems”), these criticisms were mainly borne out of environmental and social concerns.

### 4.7.1.2 Environmental Concerns



*Environmental* concerns focus on “protecting the environment or improving its condition” (Schlosberg & Bomberg, 2008, p. 187).

Because swapping and renting disrupt the traditional process of consumption, respondents’ perceptions of environmental concerns were process-oriented (i.e., users were motivated to affect unsustainable processes of production, distribution, acquisition, usage, or disposition). By adding processes of reacquisition, swapping and renting can disrupt the traditional “cradle-to-cradle” life of commodities (e.g., Allwood et al., 2006; Fletcher, 2014; Vezzoli & Manzini, 2008) into becoming more of a cyclical trajectory of Collaborative Consumption.<sup>119</sup> In this way, the Taker is not forced to reject commodity exchange for a life of voluntary simplicity or outright anti-consumption, but rather can reduce their demand on the linear consumption trajectory, while also reducing the wastes of Providers – “thus, the acquisition of others’ consumer waste may offer a fruitful pathway to a sustainable consumer society” (Brosius, Fernandez, & Cherrier, 2012, p. 4).

Fletcher and Grose (2012, p. 88) metaphorically termed this ideal lifecycle of products as a “wardrobe metabolism” where “dynamic equilibrium” could be achieved when clothing was “re-worked, shared and reused without constantly requiring a new flow of new goods and resources.” They included different strategies to increase the life of clothing such as thrift, recycling, sharing, leasing,

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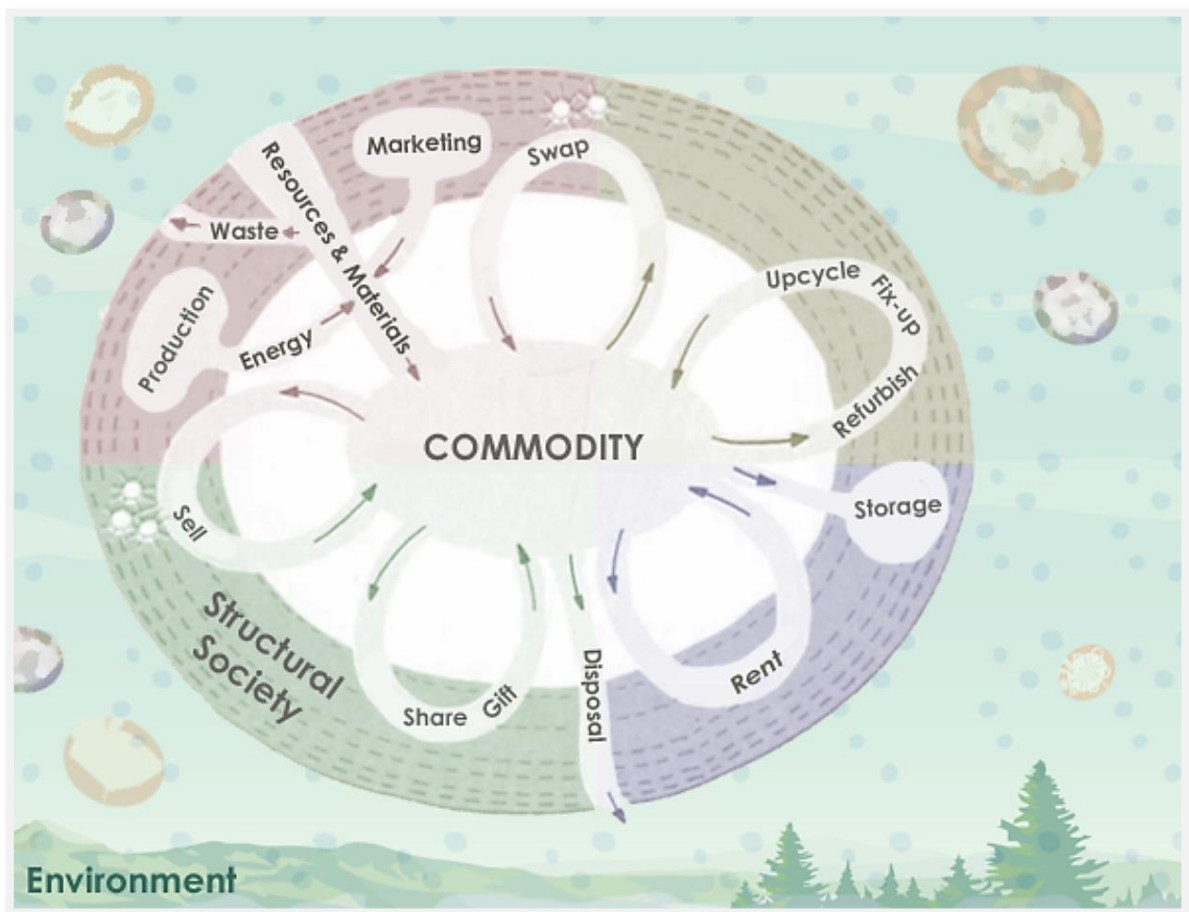
<sup>119</sup> For a discussion on consumption as a full cycle see Brosius, Fernandez, and Cherrier (2012); Gregson and Crewe (2003); and Prothero et al., (2011). My favourite quote which captures the spirit of consumption cycles came from Brosius et al (2012, p. 10):

“The object’s life cycle is not closed, and the cycle repeats through new hands. As cycle follows cycle, bringing new uses for the object, the cycles transcend the irreversible direction that constitutes the linearity of time. The object no longer moves linearly from birth to death but moves to different owners, finds different uses, and experiences new lives.”

reusing, and reworking (see **Figure 4.25** for an adapted version of this metabolism to fit the cyclical life of a “commodity”).

**Figure 4.25** Sustainable Materialism: The Metabolism of a Commodity.

Redesigned and adapted from (Fletcher & Grose, 2012)<sup>120</sup>



Renting and swapping exist as alternative consumption activities which can extend the life of a product by “reducing” and “reusing.” Although some researchers suggest used goods markets *increase* the demand for new goods (e.g., Kursten, 1991; Scitovsky, 1994), there is evidence that increases in the reacquisition of used clothing (e.g., Navaretti et al., 2000) and used books (e.g., Kirkpatrick, 2002) *has* reduced overall demand for the newer alternatives (see Thomas, 2003, pp. 67-69), because Takers are seeking second-hand objects instead of buying new.

<sup>120</sup> Fletcher and Grose’s (2012) original image of the “Wardrobe Metabolism” is available online (Moses, 2012).



Further, swapping and renting models offer a different product lifecycle trajectory than traditional buying and selling reacquisition. For example, unlike selling used goods which allows Providers the financial means to go out and buy new goods, swapping disposition entails the simultaneous reacquisition of used goods (rather than solely relying on new production). Meanwhile renting taps into the idea of increased reuse of products, where instead of buying new, rental Takers access a used good which would otherwise go to waste. Consumption in the second-hand world therefore turns “waste into profit” (Gansky, 2010, p. 81).

Using the three R’s (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle), I found swapping respondents were mostly motivated to “Reuse” and “Recycle” through ethical *disposition* (i.e., Providers, as simultaneous Takers, perceived swapping disposition as environmentally friendly compared to other types of disposition). Meanwhile, rental respondents were more motivated to “Reduce” through ethical *acquisition* (i.e., rental Takers perceived renting as more environmentally friendly than buying something that wouldn’t be used, while rental Providers perceived their items being shared as helping prevent people from senselessly buying something new).

Political consumerism has most often concerned the life history of commodities (e.g., Beck, 2000), politics behind products (Balsiger, 2013), and sustainable materialism<sup>121</sup> (Scholsberg & Coles, 2015). Research suggests consumers do not have to pay the full price of goods when it comes to their consumption and impact on the planet because of a lack of disincentives (e.g., Mont, 2008a). Some of my respondents expressed similar opinions. For example, rental Provider Anita expressed a concern for the biography of products:

“We’ve got such unprecedented access to cheap goods from china and India so it’s incredibly tempting you know, why shouldn’t I change my cushion covers and couch every couple of years or whatever it is people want to do, but in the end what we pay for items is really not their fair value, [...] we’re not paying the proper cost.”

Bob, as a rental Provider, thought his “ability to put [his] things back into the market for other people to use, [was] in the long run far more efficient and ecologically friendly than just hoarding it.” Similarly, Earl, as a rental Taker, said he saw temporary access as “a more responsible way to live,” as

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121 (i.e., Cyclical movement of commodities through disposition and reacquisition). I use the traditional definition of “materialism” here which explains the movement of materials (e.g., “matter and its movements,” Novack, 1965), rather than the more popular definition which describes an ideology of consumers valuing relationships with materials beyond instrumentality.

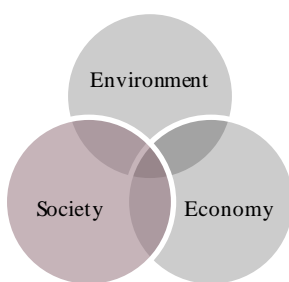
Desired rental Taker Anita stressed, renting minimised “production in the embodied energy and carbon and all that sort of business,” and “if people can share their things, then it should reduce the cost of manufacturing, and the cost to the planet.” Anita’s concern traverses both economic and environmental concerns (i.e., she wanted businesses to be producing less to reduce negative impacts on the planet). Samuel said he “enjoyed [his] experience renting from individuals because it does give reuse to underutilised resources and so it has a sustainability aspect and [he] enjoy[ed] that.”

Similarly, many respondents perceived swapping to be a more *environmentally* sustainable option than other disposition practices because as Kelly put it, “I’m at least helping not lead to so much waste.” For example, Rose thought swapping was “a really cool concept” because instead of “wasting items,” swapping involved “reusing items [...] and saving the environment.” Consider also swapping user Jillian’s thoughts:

“You’re helping the environment by not buying new stuff that takes so much out of the environment to make.”

However, the prominence of swapping respondents bringing up environmentalism as an *extrinsic* motivation occurred far less often than with renting respondents. Rather, swapping users were more *intrinsically* concerned about waste (recall examples from the “Type of Transferred Object” dimension where many swapping users felt an aversion to throwing things away).

### 4.7.1.3 Societal Concerns



*Societal* concerns focus on protecting quality of life for individuals in society (e.g., Eisenberg & Mussen, 1989; Mohr et al., 2001).

Another motivation was the desire to move away from materialism and over-consumption, or as rental Taker Bailey asked herself, “That whole consumerism thing, do I really need that?” Many respondents perceived the current values of consumerism such as a mentality of keeping up with the Jones’ and obsession with material possessions were not good for society.

Thus, as a political concern, respondents said they sought a healthy lifestyle balance of consumption, or as Desired rental Provider Joel put it, “I think the world would be a better place if everyone did consume less as a fundamental tenet.” Many respondents critically discussed ideologies of consumerism (i.e., buy more, desire more, use it all up, consumption as leisure) and blamed it on their perceptions of past marketing having engineered this wasteful desire. For example, two-way rental user Charlotte said:

“We shouldn’t be that attached to material things as we’ve always been *brainwashed* to be.”

This tapped into being part of an anti-consumerist movement (e.g., Binkley & Littler, 2008; Black & Cherrier, 2010), where for example Desired rental Taker Bob described his attitude toward consumerism:

“I’ve always found it very unappealing, because it’s so wasteful, and so by renting a good I’m not playing into it, instead of buying things for this one-off use and having to think about disposing of it immediately or eventually or disposing of its packaging and all that crap around it.”

Bob also went on to explain his underlying abhorrence to consumerism:

“I don’t have that same sort of similar materialistic pride that I kind of feel like growing up all these people would count their worth as ‘by having a good, if they had more stuff than you;’ it was a constant aggregation of items that you sort of defined yourself by ownership.”

Rental Taker Bailey appreciated P2P renting because it allowed her to move away from such conspicuous consumption. When I asked her to expand, she gave a general observation that those around her defined their status by what they owned, saying there is “a sort of snobbery around needing to own something big like a car or house.” This consumer perception that owning a house or car affords a package of prestige has been a common finding in the literature (e.g., Rowlands & Gurney, 2001). Bailey’s comments are also similar to Roux and Guiot’s (2008, p. 72) exploration of offline second-hand markets, where buyers exhibited “anti-ostentation” toward traditional consumerism.

This *rejection* of consumerist values also criticised political consumerism itself. For example, many rental respondents perceived their participation as an alternative to mainstream sustainability (i.e., buying only ethically labelled products through positive consumption). Research supports these

concerns. For example, Sanne (2001) found if products are labelled as eco-friendly, consumers may sometimes think it is okay to consume more, making any environmental gains null. This “boomerang effect” (Bolton, Cohen, & Bloom, 2006) could sometimes cause people to “treat pro-environmental behaviors as an excuse to engage in less eco-friendly practices later on” (Phipps et al., 2013, p. 1230).

Echoing Hamilton’s (2010a; 2010b) comments that mainstream sustainability and social conscientiousness have become a commodity and depoliticised, rental Provider Jack especially lambasted these wonted attempts at sustainability as disillusioned:

“Green marketing is almost hilarious to me, because it’s like ‘yeah we’re just going to market you all these products and then you’re going to be green, congratulations!’ [...] But that’s really not what it’s all about.”

Two-way rental user Leigh similarly criticised other ways of being sustainable:

“People are so misguided [...] it’s all based on the hype, [...] advertising, media, like, people are all like “organic, organic” (mocking) but no one really understands what organic really is and now it’s just a gimmick [...] they just kind of have a notion that it is good.”

This concludes the three main types of political concerns shared by consumers. Although some social concerns were discussed (e.g., terminal materialism, unhealthy desire with conspicuous consumption), the majority of respondents were mostly concerned with the environment. This oversight for the dimensions of the economy and society supports previous research which found that consumers often narrowly focus on the environmental/ecological dimension when considering “sustainability” (e.g., Peattie & Collins, 2009; Simpson & Radford, 2012).

I now turn to the actual *level* of respondent’s concerns with a discussion of how important these concerns were and accordingly how involved users became with their consumption choices.

## 4.7.2 Political Consumerism:

### Level of Resistance, Importance, and Involvement

Stolle and Hooghe (2003) specified that in order for a consumption act to be politically motivated, a consumer had to be *aware* of a political problem and believe their consumption could help address that problem. Many of my respondents *were* aware of overconsumption and a throwaway society hurting the environment, and they *believed* swapping and renting could address this problem. Consider rental user Wade's, and swapping user Kelly's thoughts as examples:

"I don't consider myself a super-green person but I mean hey – I think we gotta do our part and I mean I believe in global warming; I think we are impacting our environment so any little thing we can do I think is important so I totally believe in it" (Wade).

"I think the environment is pretty important. I'm working on my PhD in horticulture so I've done a lot of stuff outside and I kind of know how valuable land is, so it's like, 'well if I can maybe recycle or swap clothes and stuff rather than it ending up in a landfill – that's probably gonna be a big call'" (Kelly).

However, the *level* of users' political concerns, rejection of traditional consumption practices, and resulting involvement varied between respondents. Thus, the next two sections explore whether a consumer was actively motivated by that problem.

### 4.7.2.1 Levels of Political Resistance:

#### Alternative/Anti-Consumerism



The *Level of Resistance* consideration has to do with a person's amount of "resistance to, distaste of, or even resentment of consumption" (Zavetoski, 2002, p. 121) and desire "to withstand the force or affect of" consumerism (Penaloza & Price, 2003, p. 123). The

level of resistance resides on a political spectrum of (1) Alternative-consumerists – those who do not want to escape the market, but rather supplement the market with alternative choices; and (2) Anti-consumerists – those who hold a more radical rejection of mainstream consumption and want to withdraw (partially or fully) from consumer society. There is also a lesser resistance than alternative

consumerism (i.e., where consumers engage in informal second-hand exchange), which Seyfang (2005) called “mainstream sustainable consumption” (i.e., where consumers selectively choose ethically produced goods).

I was not surprised to find most respondent’s mirrored swapping user Natalia’s deterministic, alternative-consumerist thoughts on the matter:

“I make like an effort but I don’t go out of my way, like for instance I always recycle when possible but I wouldn’t go so far as you know anything that would really change my life, that would really have like a detrimental effect on my life like for instance I wouldn’t give up driving just because it’s bad but I mean if there are little things that I can do then I’ll do them.”

Beyond reasons of determinism, some respondents held a general rejection of radical consumerism because they perceived radical consumers as stigmatised actors in society. Foden’s (2012) study on Freecycle and Freegle found participants were “often keen to distance themselves from these associations” of “consumption is political” (p. 160). Similarly, swapping user Sarah said she was made fun of by her friends and co-workers for being “a recycling Nazi” when discussing her intrinsic need to not let things go to waste. Further, a rejection of ownership goes against capitalist society, making it stigmatised as an inferior consumption mode (e.g., Cheshire et al., 2010; Durgee & O’Connor, 1995; Ronald, 2008)

Previous research has also suggested the use of alternative consumption channels may provide competing sign value; for more affluent consumers a sign of more responsible consumption; but for low income consumers a sign they are excluded from traditional channels (Williams & Paddock, 2003). It is this latter sign value which may help explain the stigmatisation of being seen as an alternative consumer in the second-hand world. For example, Hiller Connell’s (2009) exploration of second-hand acquisition revealed a common perception that second-hand clothing was for lower-income people and wasn’t “intended for people of higher socio-economic levels” (p. 2).

However, participants in this study described how they had re-appropriated the meaning of renting and swapping. Many renting respondents perceived CC as more ‘hip than hippy’ than other types of political consumerism (e.g., voluntary simplifiers, living off second-hand thrift) because it was a more valid commercial option and “it just [made] sense.” Jack projected his beliefs about renting between peers onto others:

“People don’t even think it’s like a hippy thing, you know I live in the Bay area and you know there is this big like whatever you want to call it, the hippies or whatever, and they’re here and they love the idea and even the people who are walking with their Starbucks latte, you know and you can tell they’re dressed for business; I’ve been at a table at events in downtown San Francisco and you know exactly what these people are doing with their lives and they’re super down for it.”

When I asked two-way rental user Lynne what she thought of P2P renting and other CC types, Lynne thought aloud on the “hippy” concept, saying “I guess that idea of how people see swapping as maybe being a bit ‘hippy-ish’ or for some people that they would never consider it, but when it involves a financial transaction and there are safety mechanisms in place, that’s sort of how you could roll it out to make it a larger more valid option for the larger portion of the community.” Swapping users also shared this assumption. For example, swapping user Natalia wished swapping websites “were more mainstream” because “a lot of people are super sceptical.” She expanded:

“I’ve told some friends they’re like, ‘ew why would you want to share items with people you don’t know?!’ [...] like ‘oh wow what a waste of time’ or ‘that’s gross’ I mean like surprisingly they didn’t really bring up ‘oh how can you trust people?’ [...] so I just think a lot of people that have bad reservations about it but people should just give it more of a chance because again, I love the experience of it.”

These findings have a couple of implications. Firstly, it might be possible the trend against unsustainable ownership is growing. Many respondents were adamant they would not want others to see them as wasteful or materialistic. This idea has been supported in the literature: socially laudable activities such as sharing can bring internally generated feelings of self-worth, while acting contrary to this (such as hoarding) may raise feelings of indignity (Kalafatis et al., 1999). Secondly, the findings might suggest people were minimising their perception of it being a “hippy-ish” concept because they did not want to be seen as “hippy-ish.” For instance, Jack said he hated “to sound like such an esoteric hippy or something like that,” suggesting his perception of being labelled as such was undesirable. Thus, when Desired Reality motivations were strong, users sometimes lessened their perception of existing deterrents in their Perceived Reality of social forces (e.g., cognitive dissonance justification).

Renting and swapping were mostly perceived as supplementary to mainstream consumption – but the level of importance and involvement can be explored more by considering whether consumers were actively or passively concerned with their consumption.

### 4.7.2.2 Levels of Political Importance and Involvement:



#### Active versus Passive Concern



The *Levels of Importance and Involvement* consideration indicates whether or not the person is more actively or passively involved with their political concern. Similar to Carrington, Neville, and Whitwell's (2012) distinction between primary and secondary ethical concerns,

this dimension considers how users prioritised their consumption activities. Passive consumers place political concerns as secondary to other motivations. According to Carrington et al. (2012, p. 2762), secondary ethical concerns are often “forgotten, rarely integrated into shopping plans, and traded off with other salient considerations such as cost, convenience, and other ethical issues when” making consumption decisions. Alternatively, active consumers place political concerns as a high priority and of primary importance in their decision-making. The main differences between swapping and renting users when it came to prioritising political concerns are summarised in **Table 4.7**.

**Table 4.7** The *Level of Involvement and Importance* of Political Consumerism.

 <div>Passive Consumers</div>	<div>Active Consumers</div> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivation to swap/rent may be softly guided by political values. However, this motivation is <i>passive</i> and secondary to other motivations. The consumer can easily be swayed to another option if offered more personal value (i.e., utilitarian/hedonic).</li> <li>• Not concerned with the collective power of swapping/renting as a political action for change.</li> <li>• Likely to be <i>flexible</i> with consumption choices that deviate from the political value.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivation to swap/rent is primarily and <i>actively</i> driven by political values.</li> <li>• May have a desire to educate others about the political benefits of swapping/renting.</li> <li>• May try to influence others to participate so the collective benefits can be activated.</li> <li>• May also engage in other alternative forms of consumption as their political concerns have become consumption "habits."</li> <li>• May experience <i>cognitive dissonance</i> with consumption choices that contradict their political concerns.</li> </ul>

Although political concerns were often a relevant and prominent topic of discussion by respondents, nearly all renters (and all swappers) were essentially *passive* consumers because they commonly clarified these benefits to be mostly, as two-way rental user Lynne and swapping users Natalia and



Sarah put it, “an added bonus,” rather than active pursuit. As rental Provider Barbara further stated on the matter of her motivation for P2P renting:

“I don’t know why I like it, maybe it’s to save money, be able to make money, and be able to share, and probably sort of like we don’t need so much consumerism. Maybe it’s a cheaper concept, but I guess I haven’t really thought too much about it yet. [...] Maybe it is the sustainability that I like.”

When I asked rental Taker William what he thought of P2P renting and various ethical concerns, he said he was “pretty blasé” about it and “not overly focused on materialism” when it came to his consumption choices. However, he admitted to being initially interested in the idea of peer-to-peer renting because of Botsman’s TED talk on “lowering the footprint on the environment.”

Passive consumers did not want to be creative with disrupting their usual lifestyle so they opted to *use* alternative markets which had been created by others. They may have felt a connection to the collective movement of this market, but they were not motivated to further activate or advance the collectivity to make a political impact.

A minority of respondents were more *active* and adamantly discussed their consumption choices being guided by political concerns. For example, when I asked why they liked P2P renting, rental Providers Anita and Jack gave political concerns as their primary motivation:

“For me the more important thing is that it’s helping to reduce consumerism” (Anita).

“Honestly the biggest thing that appeals to me about it is [...] how to reduce people’s carbon footprints” (Jack).

Anita was also actively involved in other consumption alternatives, such as being “a monitor on free-cycle.” Meanwhile, rental Taker Bailey had a relatively *active* thought process when it came to making ethical decisions with her daily consumption:

“Sometimes I am and sometimes I’m not [sustainable]. Like I still consume [...] and I don’t say that I’m perfect at everything; there are some things that I go, ‘ohhh I can’t do that,’ [...] we try to do those little things or think about before we go buy anything new, we’ll say, “well do we really need this, can we make something from somewhere else?””

Similarly, swapping user Joanna was relatively *active* when it came to ethical disposition choices:

“I’m not probably as environmentally savvy as a lot of people but I don’t like throwing clothes away, I don’t think I’ve ever thrown clothing away but um, as far as recycling, I’m all into recycling, [...] I like the fact that, as far as recycling clothing, that it’s being used by somebody else [...] instead of just being [...], thrown or tossed away, [...] so it’s kinda nice to recycle that.”

Swapping user Corrine was also ethically *active* when it came to her disposition choices:

“I don’t like things to go to waste, [...] I was working at a costume shop for a while and they always wanted to throw old clothes away because they had so many and they couldn’t deal with them [...] and I would always like pull them out of the garbage and take them to the thrift store because I just can’t stand like things going to waste and going to the landfill if they don’t have to and stuff like that.”

The *most* active consumers (i.e., these were only represented by renting respondents) wanted to *legitimise* the consumer market by creating and/or seeking solutions to political concerns. Therefore, active consumers also sought to influence others and achieve a collective power which could “make a difference.” For example, consider rental Provider Ariel as an example of a more *actively* concerned political consumer when discussing her vision of P2P renting and Collaborative Consumption:

“I like to [...] have a mind-set where from time to time I think, ‘What else can I help to [...] make a difference?’ [...] individually, ‘How could I be a powerful individual in my own way?’ [...] I was just thinking you know if I, if we, can all have that cultural shift in thinking [...] what a big difference it could make, and yeah that just sort of excited me like that, just like wow! You know, imagine the change in the way society functions [...] interacting with people around my community and [...] just making a difference in others’ lives [...] it’s just an incredible vision.”

Active consumers often try to influence others’ participation so the collective benefits can be activated (Follesdal, 2004). For example, Two-way rental user Leigh as a key informant (i.e., an intern at a P2P renting company) explained her thoughts on trying to influence others about the collective and individualistic benefits of renting:

“I think that it’s a slow moving process getting people to believe that sharing is good and people are warming up, it’s really hard to change consumer behaviour. [...] At the heart of it we are trying to change [...] people’s ideas

that ownership is good to renter-ship is good to like sharing is good because it increases utility [...] you know you can get anything you want in life if you consider renting or sharing, and I think that people don't understand that."

Most rental *key informant* respondents (i.e., founders) were also *active* because many had acted as user-entrepreneurs (i.e., they said they had created the rental website because they had seen a problem they wanted to fix rather than solely to create an economic venture). This creative influence and attempt to change markets makes them more akin to "political entrepreneurs of political consumerism" (Balsiger, 2013, p. 17) because they attempted to transform society through "ecological entrepreneurship" (e.g., Marsden & Smith, 2005) and/or "social entrepreneurship" (e.g., Ney et al., 2014; Sen, 2006) by creating their website.

Using Seyfang and Smith's (2007) terminology, many rental websites were thus examples of "grassroots innovation," "networks of activists and organisations generating novel bottom-up solutions for sustainable development; solutions that respond to the local situation and the interests and values of the communities involved" (p. 585). For example, Tara, as a rental key informant, explained the impetus behind making her P2P renting website had been in response to the local situation:

"I kind of came at it from a community perspective which was more about thinking 'how can communities come together and support each other?' [...] the potential downturn of the economy, bear in mind this was back in 2007, there were people looking for new things to be doing environmentally, and also, basically for us, because we are designers and kind of worked very much on the innovations for a long time, you know doing social media and all these people are connecting and doing social media online, these were three big drivers for us."

Using Smith's (2000) definition of grassroots organisations, many swapping and renting websites I studied could be considered as such because they were "significantly autonomous, volunteer-run" and "non-profit" oriented (p. 7). For example, from my interviews and exposure to the websites, I found a few swapping websites with founders who ran the website as a hobby and did not charge its users, while volunteer administrators were commonplace. One rental website was similarly founded by volunteers who said they had wanted to make a difference in their community. Although none of my respondents could be labelled at the extreme pole of *active consumerism*, many rental respondents spoke with active intentions. For example, consider rental user Wade's explanation of trying to influence others and sponsor political concerns:

“It’s something that I kinda promote as well, you know we’re trying to make partnerships that are around sustainability and green causes because I think that’s important and one of the things that we want to do with [renting website] once we kind of get more traction is actually give back some of the green causes. That’s very important [...] we wanna give back because, hey we gotta take care of our environment and this might be a very small way to do it but I think people do care about that.”

Active rental respondents were also motivated to be part of a movement, an alternative consumption revolution, or as two-way rental user Tara saw it, a “re-evolution” of tapping into latent but available behaviours. Jack animatedly agreed, “it’s just the scene is so amazing, when you realise what a concept it is, when you realise how big and powerful of an idea it is, it blows you away and you really want to be a part of it.” This finding is similar to other alternative consumption studies which have shown consumers who engage in voluntary simplicity perceived themselves as part of a movement (e.g., Alexander & Ussher, 2012; Sandlin & Walther, 2009).

Sometimes respondents were actively concerned for one concern while more passively concerned about another. For example, two-way rental user Lynne said she was actively “interested in the community and the reducing materialism side of things” but when it came to “the environmental and sustainability aspects,” which she “totally [got] and totally [saw],” Lynne passively addressed this “other stuff as a great bonus.” Meanwhile two-way rental user Earl at first glance seemed to be passively involved:

“The fact that it’s good for the environment and all the other environmental benefits, those are nice, but the real reason that I do it is because it’s often cheaper.”

However, on multiple occasions Earl idealistically sought “human” interactions with his and others’ consumption (i.e., as a rejection of faceless corporations), saying, “It’s not just you and a business, it’s you with a face [...] I think just meeting people is a healthy thing to do [...] there’s a sort of social benefit, you can learn how to trust people.” Thus, Earl showed some concern for social sustainability.

No matter how active respondents reported to be, I believe “pure” activism is not possible just as pure altruism has often been assumed a myth. Although respondents may have held economic, social, or environmental concerns, there was always an inevitable *mix* between individualistic and political values driving a person’s choices. As rental Taker Bailey put it:

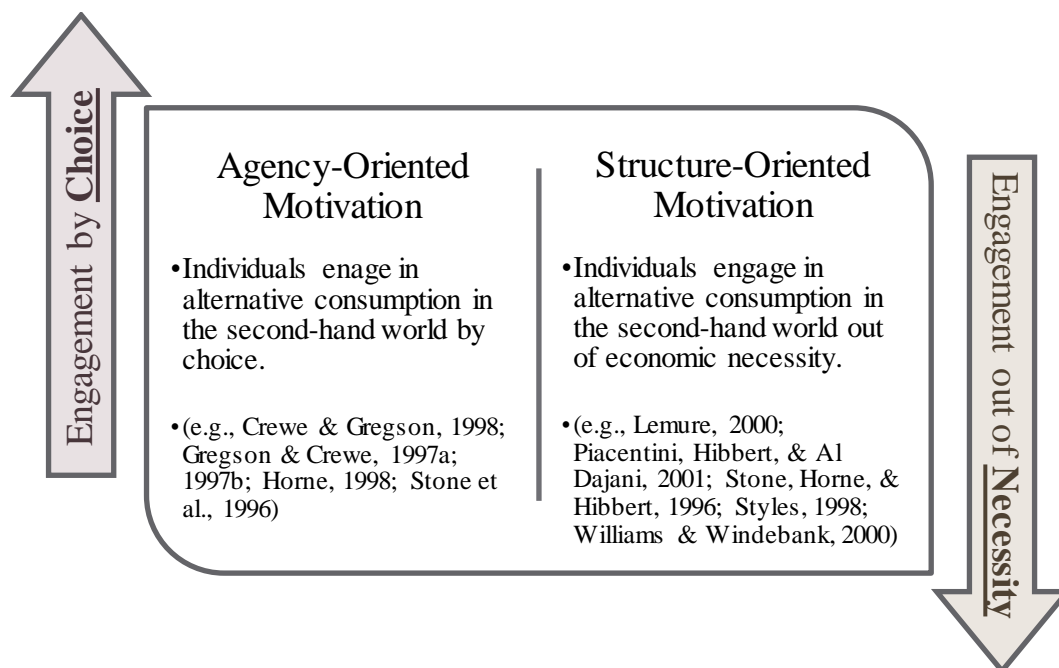
“I’m a big concurrent activity person. I’m very task orientated and I kind of like it that I can not only save the world, I can save some money, make some money for another family, and I can get to know people so that ticks a lot of boxes.”

Thus, I come to the question of whether or not the “Political Consumerism” distinction actually matters. That is, do politically motivated consumers have the *power* to act politically through their consumption? Or is “politics” within consumption just another out-of-reach aspiration for consumers to desire in a capitalistic market (e.g., Bradshaw & Zwick, 2014)?

### 4.7.3 Political Consumerism as an Illusory Gap?

The literature on political consumerism is rich with debate on whether or not consumers actually *have* the power of agency to make a political impact (e.g., Coff, 2006; Hamilton 2010a; 2010b; Jacobsen & Dulsrud, 2007; Lang & Heasman, 2004; Maniates, 2002; Spaargaren, 2011). Such debates typically suggest the notion of political consumerism is an out of reach myth for politically-minded individuals. Consumers are constrained not only by their existing values and perceptions which they have been moulded to uphold (e.g., McCracken, 1986; van Dam & Apeldoorn, 1996),<sup>122</sup> not only by a lack of awareness to the consequences of consumption (i.e., the invisible life of commodities), nor by weak willpower, but more importantly, consumers are constrained by their available resources (i.e., time, money, skill) and nearby infrastructure for consumption (i.e., the way in which commodities are organised to move throughout society). Thus, I come back to the agency-structure problem (see **Figure 4.26**), where it has been argued by scholars (e.g., Caruana, 2007; Caruana & Chatzidakis, 2013) that neglecting to consider deterministic influences is “sociologically naïve” because “people do not develop ideas and ways of doing ‘from within’ by themselves” (Spaargaren, 2011, p. 814).

**Figure 4.26** Competing Motivations for Alternative Consumption in the Second-Hand World.



<sup>122</sup> For example, past marketing messages that have promoted mainstream non-sustainable practices (e.g., wasteful consumption) can become normalised and contradict a consumer’s desire for political consumerism (e.g., Cherrier, 2012).

As Sayer (1997) explained, “economic forces continue to dominate contemporary life, and thus, however unfashionable, economic analysis cannot be sidelined.” (p. 16). My interviews supported such deterministic barriers. For example, after discussing environmental political concerns and ways in which she acted politically with her consumption, swapping user Jillian pointed out that, as a consumer, she was ultimately constrained by her wallet:

“Some of the environmental stuff costs a lot, like my family doesn’t have that kind of money to turn everything green, but like the little simple things I do try to follow up on.”

Many respondents held various levels of political concern (i.e., attitudes). Some believed their involvement with swapping/renting could help address these concerns. However, as soon as personal barriers became present, most respondents said they would turn to an easier/cheaper alternative (i.e., behaviours). Thus, my findings can be added to the string of literature which has suggested an attitude-intentions-behaviour gap is ever-present on the stage of responsible consumerism. Like many others before me (e.g., Barr, Gilg, & Ford, 2001; Devinney, Auger, & Eckhardt, 2010; Hamari et al., 2015; Marchand, Walter, & Cooper, 2010; Ozanne & Ballantine, 2010; Prothero et al., 2011), I argue that people who participate in environmentally friendly alternatives do not always do so for political concerns, but instead for reasons of self-interest, including factors such as price, convenience, and a sense of community. For example, when I asked Sarah broadly what she thought of sustainability and swapping, she said it was an added bonus rather than a political consumption choice:

“If I need something I’m gonna get it whether it’s via swapping or via eBay or via you know, a department store. If I need something, then I’m gonna acquire it in the way that is the best way to get it.”

Thus, because “consumers are not the same as citizens” (Hamilton, 2010a, p. 574),<sup>123</sup> sustainable consumption choices must be embedded in opportunistic gain, which is reinforced by many participants in this study who stated their decision to rent, swap, or buy would always, as two-way rental user Charlotte put it, “come down to a matter of price.” However, upon closer examination, “price” had more to do with compromising “value” (e.g., Peattie, 2001). Respondents considered the “Delicate Balancing Act” (Carrington & Neville, 2016, p. 204) between the time, energy, and costs

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123 The distinction between consumers and citizens was first introduced in **Figure 4.236**. For further information on the subject, I recommend starting with Hamilton’s (2010a) explanation of why “it is not inconsistent for consumers to decline to take up green power when it is offered but to vote for a political party that promises to require everyone to buy green power” (p. 574).

they needed to expend and the benefits they perceived would be gained (be it monetary, social interactions, experiences, actual political effect, or otherwise). Accordingly, I agree wholeheartedly with Williams and Paddock, (2003, p. 318), who suggested the “binary thinking” of agency-structure must “be replaced by a both/and approach” when considering motivations and consequences of alternative consumption. Thus, intrinsic and extrinsic factors must be *symbiotically* considered as the building blocks for consumer motivation and behaviour (e.g., Nukpe, 2012). Rather than focusing only on “attitudes” and “intentions” (i.e., forms of *individual agency*) within the attitude-intention-behaviour gap, we must also consider the situational and *structural* characteristics of available political consumption modes.

Although many researchers (e.g., Connolly & Prothero, 2008; Stolle & Hooghe, 2003) argue that consumers need to be *aware* of a political problem being affected by their consumption (i.e., link their consumption with a detrimental effect) to be politically motivated to make change, Brosius et al. (2012) found many consumers in their study were originally unaware of or unconcerned by waste as their motivation to become involved with urban scavenging. However, Brosius et al. (2012) then discovered many of these same participants (i.e., inorganic collectors) became politically influenced *over time*:

“As a consequence of being confronted with society’s waste, inorganic collectors often were motivated to act more sustainably in the future (and did so). Thus, whether the motive for inorganic collecting is initially sustainability is unimportant – rather, [...] behaving sustainable, regardless of why and how it is motivated, results in more such behaviors. [...] Urban scavenging might have the effect of contributing to a sustainable consumer society, even if those who practice it may not initially (or ever) do so for the purpose of consuming sustainably” (p. 12).

Brosius et al. (2012, p. 13) reflected that this observation, where sustainable actions could engender politically concerned attitudes, was “the reverse of the attitude-behavior gap,” and therefore called it “a behaviour-attitude gap.” Upon re-reading Botsman and Rogers’ (2010) book, I found they had also suggested CC offered a behaviour-attitude gap with the following proposition:

“One could argue that it doesn’t matter whether the system leads to a change in mind-set as long as it converts our consumption into positive outcomes [...] The fact that it attracts new consumers based on traditional self-interested motivation [...] and that it converts this into positive social and environmental outcomes, should not detract from its overall impact on consumer behaviour.



“When people enter Collaborative Consumption through one particular door [...] they become more receptive to other kinds of collective or community-based solutions. Over time, these experiences create a deep shift in consumer mind-set. [...] Along the way, the acts of collaboration and giving become an end in themselves. Collaborative Consumption shows consumers that their material wants and needs do not need to be in conflict with the responsibilities of a connected citizen.” (Botsman & Rogers, 2010, pp. 216-217).

A few of my interviews similarly resonated with these ideas. For example, rental Provider Ariel, as a relatively *active* political consumer, thought if more people tried out P2P renting, they would realise its benefits and start to shift their overall consumer philosophy:

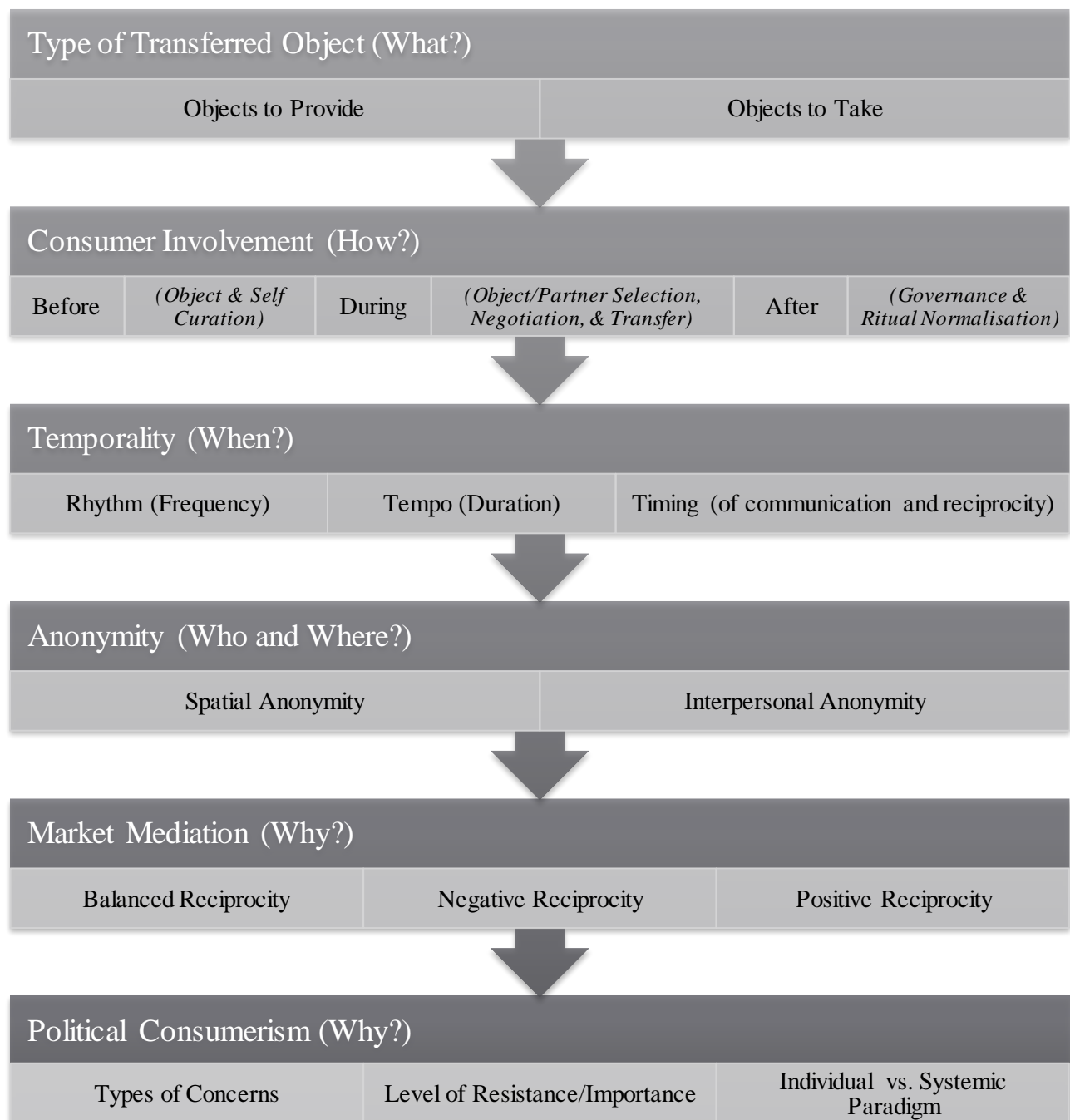
“I think not many people know about this now but once [...] you make your first transaction and you see the benefit you bring to others and to yourself and you know it’s like another incentive to do more, list more, for me I think it’s just a great thing that could possibly occur like you know the future in that it’s probably [...] one of the solutions that could solve a lot of the problems we have in society today, [...] would be another way to promote this whole cultural thinking and you know it’s just great, I really enjoyed the whole [P2P renting website] experience.”

Coming back to the agency-structure problem, a common perception by respondents and theorists alike is that participation in alternative forms of consumption can start to shape people’s “thinking and doing” in the future by creating “confidence” that their behaviour will make an impact (e.g., Stern, 2000). As Phipps et al. (2013) argued, “past behaviour can influence both personal and environmental factors and, in turn, affect future behaviours” (p. 1228). Thøgersen and Crompton (2009) referred to this occurrence as a “spillover” effect, where political action in one aspect of consumption can leak into other areas of consumption.

Although many respondents perceived they were constrained and sometimes perceived their efforts at making a change as fruitless, there were still optimistic political consumers. Thus, I close this section of political consumerism (the final referential dimension from my findings) with rental respondent Leigh’s statement on CC’s progression: “it’s all in a perfect world and I know the world’s not perfect, but we can certainly work towards making it more perfect.”

## 4.8 Findings Summary

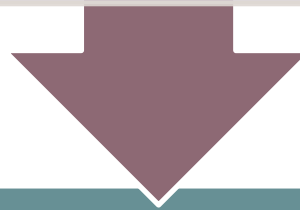
This concludes my main findings, which were discussed within the six referential dimensions summarised below. In the next and final chapter, I revisit my initial research questions and offer reflections for this research in terms of contributions, limitations, and ideas for future research.



## (Section 5.1) Primary Research Questions

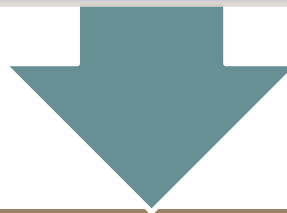
The primary research questions introduced in Chapter One are discussed and summarised:

- (Q1) What is the nature of the experience derived from peer-to-peer CC activities, and how does it differ between user-types (Providers, Takers, and Non-Users) and CC type (P2P renting and online swapping)?
- (Q2) What are the motivating and deterring factors behind peer-to-peer CC activities and how do they differ between CC-types and user-types?



## (Section 5.2) Managerial Implications

The secondary research question (Q3) which asked "What are some enabling factors that might make these systems more appealing?" is addressed with a discussion of Implications for CC stakeholders. Recommendations based on the findings from this report are made for future and current stakeholders of online swapping and P2P renting websites.



## (Section 5.3) Research Reflection

Contributions

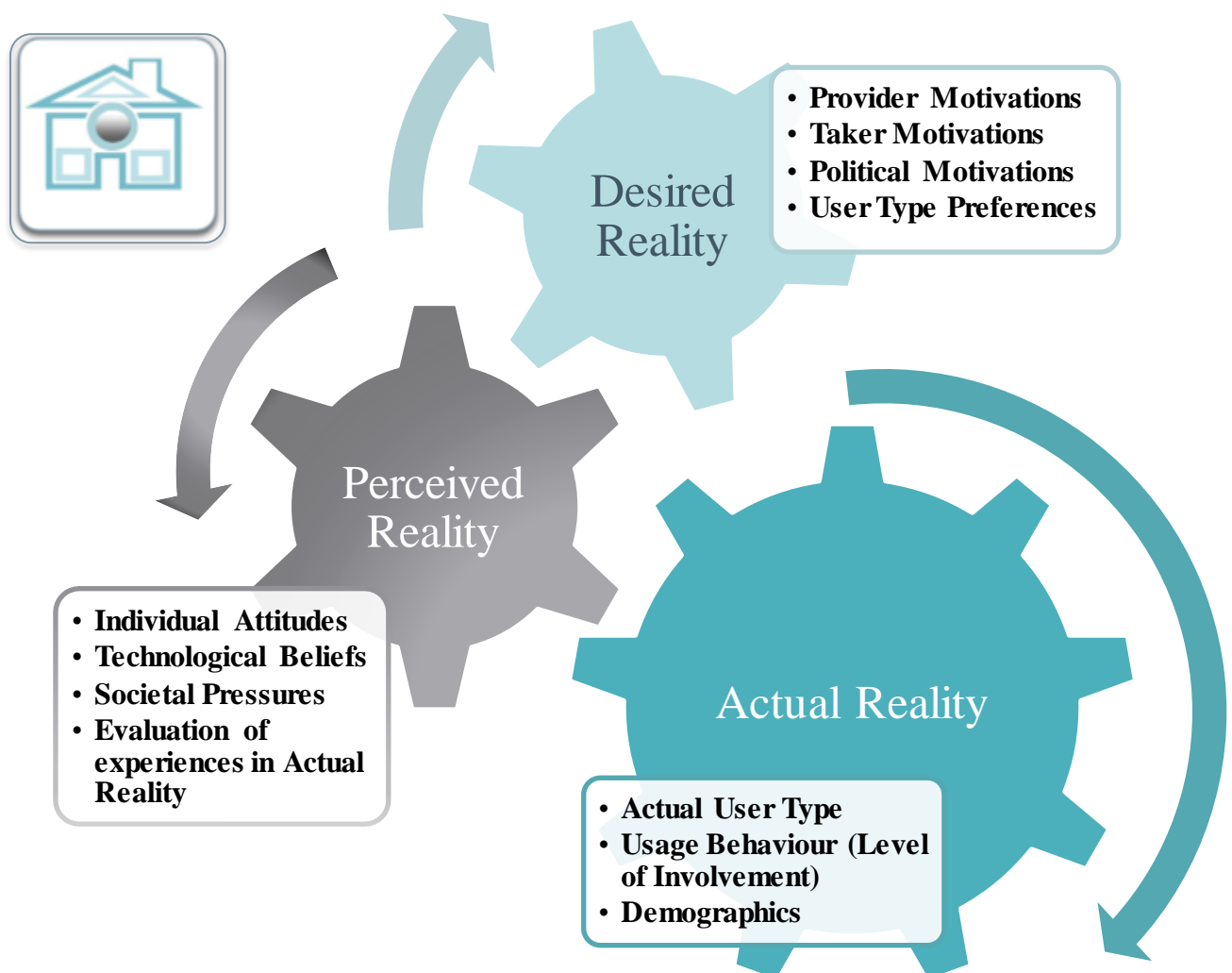
Limitations

Future Research

## 5.1 Research Questions

As introduced in Section 3.1.2, I provided a Theoretical Diagram (see **Figure 3.3** and **Figure 5.1**) to address my first research question (“What is the Nature of the experiences derived from P2P renting and online swapping?”). This model distinguishes between layers<sup>124</sup> and manifestations of reality, and therefore helps clarify the nature of my findings. Using this model, I now turn to my primary research questions, to be addressed in the next two sections.

**Figure 5.1** The Nature of Experienced Reality.



<sup>124</sup> “Structural Reality” is left out of this illustration because my interviews did not explore this “black box” layer of reality, but its relevance should still be considered.

### 5.1.1 **Question 1:** What is the nature of the experience derived from online swapping and P2P renting?

The first question has mainly been addressed by my findings in Chapter Four, where *experiences* were explained within six dimensions (briefly summarised in **Table 5.1**).


**Table 5.1** The Nature of the Experience Derived from Online Swapping and P2P Renting.

Referential Dimensions		Online Swapping	P2P Renting
What:	Type of Transferred Object	Objects in good condition and light weight for low-cost shipping.	Functional objects with high idling capacity.
How:	Consumer Involvement	Self-service exchange with extensive co-creation.	
When:	Temporality	Cyclical transactions.	Short-term intermittent transactions.
Who: Where:	Interpersonal & Spatial Anonymity	Usually conducted entirely online, more anonymous.	Driven by both physical and online P2P interaction.
Why:	Market Mediation	Balanced monetary market mediated exchange with fears of negative reciprocity and evidence of generalised reciprocity.	
	Political Consumerism	Inspired by environmentalism and reduction in wasteful consumption.	


To better understand the nature of experiences for online swapping and P2P renting, I also offer a framework for organising the dimensions that affect the creation, design, usage, and evaluation of CC websites, where the six dimensions are applied to my theoretical diagram of manifestations and layers of reality, as shown in **Table 5.2** (Individual Self), **Table 5.3** (Technological usage), and **Table 5.4** (Society). These tables are presented as a set of questions,<sup>125</sup> which when explored can offer researchers a clearer picture of the nature of experienced reality for CC users. These tables therefore summarise my first question exploring the nature of CC exchange. Next, I turn to my second research question which addresses the motivations and deterrents of swapping and renting (Section 5.1.2).

<sup>125</sup> Some have been addressed in my findings (mostly in the “Technological Usage” manifestation), while others should be considered for future research.


**Table 5.2** The Nature of Experienced Reality: **Individual Self.**

	Perceived Reality	Desired Reality	Actual Reality
	<i>Judgments of the individual</i>	<i>Aspirations of the individual</i>	<i>Actions of the individual</i>
Type of Transferred Object	Does the individual have an aversion to sharing or unused utility? Are they possessive over objects? Do they perceive objects as part of their extended self?	What values dictate an individual's desire to acquire, use, keep, or dispose of objects? Do they seek variety and change?	How does the individual actually act on these values with regard to their acquisition, usage, and disposition of objects?
Consumer Involvement	What is the individual's level of Self-efficacy for consumption activity and involvement?	How does the individual want to be involved with consumption?	Is the individual heavily involved or passive with their consumption?
Temporality	How does the individual perceive time pressure? What is their orientation toward time?	What is an individual's desired orientation toward time? (e.g., do they want to stay busy, do they like having a lot of free time, do they like to spend a lot of time or act quickly?)	How much time pressure is the individual faced with? How fast do they take to respond to communication and actions of others? How often do they consume?
Anonymity	How does an individual perceive themselves in situations characterised by low to high interpersonal and spatial anonymity?	Does an individual exhibit a personality that seeks interpersonal and/or spatial anonymity?	How does the individual act in situations of low to high spatial and interpersonal anonymity?
Market Mediation	Does an individual believe they are generally trustworthy, selfish, altruistic, or fair; and how do they feel others see them?	Does an individual want to be seen as trustworthy, selfish, altruistic, or fair? Also how do they want to act for themselves (i.e., intrinsically)?	Does an individual act selfishly, altruistic, or fairly?
Political Consumerism	Does the individual have intrinsic political values they think are affected by their consumption, such as an aversion to waste or an inclination to help others?	Does the individual want to make their consumption decisions based on political concerns?	Does the individual actually make consumption decisions based on political concerns?

**Table 5.3** The Nature of Experienced Reality: **Technological Usage.**

	Perceived Reality	Desired Reality	Actual Reality
	<i>Judgments of the technology</i>	<i>Aspirations for the technology</i>	<i>Actions of the technology</i>
Type of Transferred Object	Do the offered objects offer the individual objects of value that are compatible with their current needs, values, or past experiences?	What types of objects do users want the website to promote, allow, and/or have available for exchange?	What types of objects does the website promote, allow, and/or have available for exchange?
Consumer Involvement	How does the user perceive the website's offered stages of co-creation and involvement?	How does the user want the website to be designed for coordinating the exchange?	How does the website actually coordinate exchange between users? What mechanisms of involvement are available? How involved are consumers (has critical participation been met?)
Temporality	How time-consuming does the user perceive the website to be? Do they perceive the website as being heavily used? How do they perceive the timing of reciprocity and communication?	What is the user's desired level of time for involvement and timing between reciprocity and communication?	How time-consuming is the website? How often do people actually participate? What is the actual timing between reciprocity and communication?
Anonymity	How does the user perceive the level of spatial and interpersonal anonymity on the site?	Does the user desire interpersonal connection or low interpersonal anonymity through the site? Do they want the website to offer them high or low spatial anonymity?	What is the level of spatial and interpersonal anonymity? How connected are users (weak or strong ties)?
Market Mediation	Do users believe the website offers positive, negative, or balanced reciprocity and contribution? What is their perception of the website's value?	Do users want to engage in positive, negative, or balanced reciprocity/contribution on the website? What value do they seek from the website?	What types of mediation does the website actually offer, and how are users contributing reciprocally? What value does the website actually give?
Political Consumerism	Do users believe their participation on the website will help address political concerns?	Do consumers want their participation on the website to address political concerns?	Does website participation actually address political concerns?

**Table 5.4** The Nature of Experienced Reality: **Society**.

	Perceived Reality	Desired Reality	Actual Reality
	<i>Judgments of Society</i>	<i>Aspirations for Society</i>	<i>Actions of society</i>
Type of Transferred Object	How does an individual perceive objects based on societal norms (e.g., social contagion, used objects versus new objects, objects as status symbols)	How does an individual's perception of societal norms around objects affect their desire for the acquisition, usage, or disposition of objects?	What norms or product trends dictate the acquisition, usage, or disposition of objects? How is the individual actually affected through their consumption actions?
Consumer Involvement	How does an individual perceive society's involvement with consumption? Do they think it is the norm to be heavily involved?	How does an individual's perception of societal norms for involvement affect their desired involvement?	How is the individual affected by societal norms of consumer involvement through their consumption?
Temporality	What is the individual's perception of societal norms around temporal conditions (e.g., frequency of acquisition and disposition)?	How does an individual's perception of societal norms toward temporal conditions affect their own desires for frequency of acquisition and disposition? What do they want the norms to be?	What are the actual norms around temporal conditions for consumption?
Anonymity	How does an individual perceive social norms of interpersonal and spatial anonymity?	Does an individual want low or high spatial and interpersonal anonymity to be the valued norm of society?	What are the actual social norms guiding interpersonal and spatial anonymity? What are its effects?
Market Mediation	Does an individual believe others in society are generally trustworthy, kind, altruistic, or selfish? How do they perceive others based on these characteristics?	Does an individual want society to be altruistic or self-centred? How does their perception of society norms affect their own desires?	Is society actually guided by trust, altruism, or selfishness? What are its effects?
Political Consumerism	Does an individual believe it is the norm to be concerned about the political effects of consumption?	Does an individual want society to be concerned about the politics of consumption? How does their perception of societal norms affect their own political concerns?	Is society actually concerned about the politics of consumption? What are its effects?



### 5.1.2 **Question 2:** What are the motivating and deterring factors for Collaborative Consumption and how do they compare between CC Type (online swapping and P2P renting) and User Type (Provider and Taker)?

As introduced in Section 2.1, my phased Literature Review approach suggested to set aside most of the literature until data collection. However, through my integrative phase, I gained insight into some of the motivations and deterrents of P2P exchange for other Collaborative Consumption contexts. These influences (summarised in **Table 5.5**) were integrated into the non-committal literature in Chapter Two as well as compared with the motivations and deterrents discussed in my findings in Chapter Four.

**Table 5.5** Generally Suggested CC Motivations and Deterrents from the Literature.

CC Motivations	CC Deterrents
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Economic Benefits</li> <li>2. Pragmatic</li> <li>3. Housekeeping</li> <li>4. Utilitarian Access</li> <li>5. Hyperconsumption Exploration</li> <li>6. Recreational Benefits</li> <li>7. Environmental Concerns</li> <li>8. Societal Concerns</li> <li>9. Gratification for Cheap Altruists</li> <li>10. Gratification for Sentimentalists</li> <li>11. Social Stickiness</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Low Critical Mass</li> <li>2. Inconvenience</li> <li>3. Lack of Value</li> <li>4. Lack of Awareness, Confidence, and/or Efficacy</li> <li>5. Lack of Trust between Strangers</li> <li>6. Social and/or Product Contagion</li> <li>7. Object Scarcity</li> <li>8. Concerns of Risk</li> <li>9. Legal Challenges</li> </ol>

Many of these influences overlapped with my findings in the P2P renting and swapping context, which are summarised and compared in **Table 5.6** (Provider Motivations), **Table 5.7** (Taker Motivations), **Table 5.8** (Provider Deterrents), and **Table 5.9** (Taker Deterrents).



**Provider Motivations.** Nearly all participants highlighted the *Economic* benefits of swapping and renting. Rental Providers were primarily motivated to earn money, preferring to rent larger ticket items to maximise their revenue, while swapping Providers were motivated to redeem their unused possessions for something they wanted at a low cost. I found evidence of both Redeemer and Rationalist decision-making styles for both swapping and renting contexts.

**Table 5.6** Provider Motivations discussed by Swapping and Renting Respondents.

Provider Motivations	Swapping	Renting
Economic Value	✓	✓
Housekeeping	✓ <i>Purging</i>	✓ <i>Dispossession</i>
Sentimentalist Gratification	✓	✓
Cheap Altruist Gratification	✓	✓
Social Contact	✓	✓
Political Concern for Environment	✓ <i>Reuse, Recycle</i>	✓ <i>Reduce</i>
Political Concern for Society		✓
<i>Political Concern for Economy</i>		

Many participants mentioned *Housekeeping* benefits. Rental Providers were motivated to take back control of idle items laying around collecting dust. For renting out their items they were able to *dispossess* themselves of the object's financial and idle "weight" and reduce their dissonance of wasted money (i.e., justify their original purchase) and/or packrat tendencies (i.e., justify keeping the item when they feel a desire to purge). Meanwhile, swapping Providers were motivated to purge and save space so they could "make room for the new."

Although participants wanted to increase their own personal utility through swapping and renting, the fact that the practice contributed to collective utility also gave users a "feel good" mentality with their participation. In addition, swapping and renting enabled participants to practice an altruistic behaviour by sharing with others in a socially acceptable manner (e.g., Albinsson & Perera, 2009).

Renting and swapping transfers enabled the usage of idle possessions, which many Providers found *Sentimentally Gratifying* because they liked to see their things being used and enjoyed. In addition, renting and swapping provided an outlet for generalised reciprocity and altruistic behaviour, as many Providers said they felt *Altruistically Gratiified* to share their things which might be of high value to other people. This gratification mostly resembled "Cheap Altruism" as described by Coyne (2005) because rental Providers were able to share and still own, while swapping Providers were able to share and receive. This gratification was often increased by websites offering low spatial and interpersonal anonymity, as many respondents appreciated the friendships and *Social Contact* they had gained through their participation.

Participants also valued that the consumption practice allowed them to live a more sustainable, anti-materialistic lifestyle that was consistent with their values. However, their political concerns and expectations differed. Rental Providers lauded the fact that temporary disposition could protect the

environment by *Reducing* the demand for newly produced resources (i.e., less wasteful acquisition), while swapping Providers appreciated their things could be *Reused* and *Recycled* instead of being disposed of in a landfill (i.e., less wasteful disposition). Further, although the majority of rental respondents held political concerns for society (i.e., less materialism and conspicuous ownership), this was not a salient theme for swapping users. Meanwhile, concerns for the economy were also not significant for either renting or swapping respondents.



**Taker Motivations.** Takers were primarily motivated by two situational influences:

(1) *Circumstantial Access* – needing something for a specific event or purpose, such as a textbook for a semester, a bicycle for travelling, a dress for a party, a costume for Halloween, a gift for Christmas, and professional clothes for a job interview (these were actual examples from respondents); and (2) *Hedonic Exploration* – searching for unique experiences, novel products, and/or new things to acquire.

**Table 5.7** Taker Motivations discussed by Swapping and Renting Respondents.

<b>Taker Motivations</b>	<b>Swapping</b>	<b>Renting</b>
Economic Value	✓	✓
Circumstantial Access	✓	✓
Hedonic Exploration	✓	✓ <i>Desired Reality</i>
Social Contact	✓	✓
High Urban Density: Space Saving	✓	✓
Political Concern for Environment		✓ <i>Reduce</i>
Political Concern for Society		✓
<i>Political Concern for Economy</i>		

Ultimately, these situational influences were guided by *Economic Value*-seeking. For *Hedonic Exploration*, many Takers said they were motivated to find products they couldn't otherwise afford. For swapping, this had to do with more frequently acquiring objects of a favourite product category (e.g., books, makeup, and games). Although this was a desired reality for some rental Takers, the available objects for rent did not match this demand. Thus, for renting, this had more to do with finding one-off unique experiences with objects which were otherwise too expensive to permanently acquire.

For *Circumstantial Access*, both rental and swapping Takers were motivated to avoid the burdens of ownership (Berry & Maricle, 1973; Moeller & Wittkowski, 2010), such as the dissonance that might arise out of more permanent forms of acquisition (e.g., Chu & Liao, 2007; Denegri-Knott &

Molesworth, 2009), and enabling product trial before committing to a high involvement purchase (e.g., Lawson, 2011; Locander & Hermann, 1979; Ozanne & Ozanne, 2011). Using swapping and renting to acquire objects was thus a strategy for reducing costs of acquisition, usage, and future disposition.

Similar to Providers, Takers also appreciated *Social Contact*, as many respondents stressed a desire for community and social interaction with congruent others. Swapping Takers appreciated that their formation of swapping friends often came with added extras, such as freebies and a better experience through learning more about the product. Meanwhile, rental Takers appreciated meeting their neighbours, talking about the rental object with an individual, as well as travelling to a new area they could learn more about from the Provider.

Swapping respondents as Takers were usually not motivated by *Political Concerns*. However, rental Takers were politically motivated by *Reducing* their demand for newly produced goods, reducing consumerism, and finding alternative ways to be “green.”



**Provider Deterrents.** The most salient deterrent for Providers had to do with

transaction costs. Rental Providers were unanimously deterred by the perceived hassle and *Inconvenience* of renting out their items. Although swapping users

sometimes said it was inconvenient to take pictures or take their items to the post office, these comments were almost always overshadowed by the perceived benefits of getting an item in return, making inconvenience less significant to swapping respondents when considering the value of the transaction.

**Table 5.8** Provider Deterrents Discussed by Swapping and Renting Respondents.

Provider Deterrents	Swapping	Renting
Inconvenience	✓	✓
Lack of Value	✓ <i>For inexpensive objects</i>	✓ <i>For inexpensive, infrequently rented objects</i>
Individual Risk	✓	✓
Social Guilt Risk	✓	
Lack of Trust	✓	

However, some swapping Providers were similar to rental Providers who said the effort to provide was not worth it for inexpensive items. Further, many rental Providers explained the transaction costs were too high because they desired more frequent exchange to increase their profits. The rental website’s

low network externalities (e.g., no willing rental Takers) made many rental Providers perceive their efforts of *Object Curation* as wasted because they did not rent out their items enough to make the perceived involvement worth their time.

Although renting respondents were generally unconcerned about trust between strangers (mainly because of low anonymity and security features such as escrows and deposits), many swapping Providers had experienced first or second-hand negative reciprocity through their participation. For these users, there was a certain lack of trust and caution toward new users, which had been normalised by the swapping rule, “less experienced swappers must ship their item first.” This ritual combined with *Self Curation* mostly mitigated swapping Providers’ concerns for trusting strangers.

Providers were ultimately concerned about two types of risks: (1) Individual Risk – a fear of being cheated or wronged, such as a concern for the hidden action on the part of the Taker; and (2) Social Guilt Risk – a fear of accidentally cheating the other exchange partner. For *Individual Risk*, swapping Providers were mainly concerned with the potential theft of their object, while rental Providers were concerned their object could be damaged or lost. Meanwhile, *Social Guilt Risk* was more prevalent for swapping Providers, who were concerned they would make a mistake with *Object Curation* (e.g., not disclosing faults with the object). Although rental Providers also did not want to be seen making a mistake, this was not a common topic of concern for respondents – perhaps because they were providing something for temporary use they felt mistakes could be rectified easily throughout the many interaction points the Provider and Taker met.



**Taker Deterrents.** Takers were also deterred by high transaction costs, however not as much as for Providers. For the most part, rental Takers found P2P renting more inconvenient than traditional buying because of the required drop-off and pick-up of items, as well as trying to find an item at the exact needed time. One major deterrent for rental Takers was the asynchronous *Timing of Communication* – for example, when they couldn’t reach the Provider in time for an object they needed for a specific event. In contrast, swapping Takers found acquiring objects online through a swap as a relaxing and fun routine.

Takers were not concerned with trust between strangers, however they were concerned with the same types of risks Providers had discussed: (1) Individual Risk – a fear of being cheated or wronged, such as a concern for the hidden *information* from the Provider; and (2) Social Guilt Risk – a fear of accidentally cheating the other exchange partner.

*Individual Risk* occurred mostly for swapping Takers, who were mainly concerned that the object had not been properly described. While most rental Takers did not express any types of individual risks, there were cases where the rental Taker said they were taking a risk that the Provider might back out of the exchange at the last minute and affect their plans.

*Social Guilt Risk* was more prevalent for rental Takers, who were concerned they could accidentally damage the Provider's item. Meanwhile, swapping Takers also discussed a less minor consideration for making the Provider feel guilty if they did not appreciate their acquired object. For example, many swapping Takers said they would wait awhile before reswapping an unwanted item.

Finally, many swapping and rental Takers also discussed cases of being deterred by social and product contagion. However, this was mitigated when the object itself was for a specific event rather than an everyday item (i.e., the object was somehow special).

**Table 5.9** Taker Deterrents Discussed by Swapping and Renting Respondents.

<b>Taker Deterrents</b>	<i>Swapping</i>	<i>Renting</i>
Inconvenience		✓
Asynchronous Timing of Communication		✓
Individual Risk	✓	✓
Social Guilt Risk	✓	✓
<i>Lack of Trust</i>		
Social/Product Contagion	✓	✓

Ultimately, when I consider the overview of differences between user types, I found *taking* objects for swap and/or rent was a less vulnerable and less involved activity than *providing*. Meanwhile, Users that had signed up for P2P renting and swapping but had not yet had any transactions (i.e., Non-users) were all structurally constrained by the situation. Desired Providers said that they loved the idea and had listed many objects to provide, but no one had yet requested their items. Correspondingly, Desired Takers complained that the site had nothing they wanted and/or was not good for browsing and “window shopping.” This implies a very low critical mass deterrent for non-usage, where users were “spread too thin” (e.g. Botsman and Rogers, 2010).

This concludes the two primary research questions introduced in Section 1.2.4. Next, I discuss my secondary research question, “What are some enabling factors that might make these systems more appealing?”, which offers implications for managers.

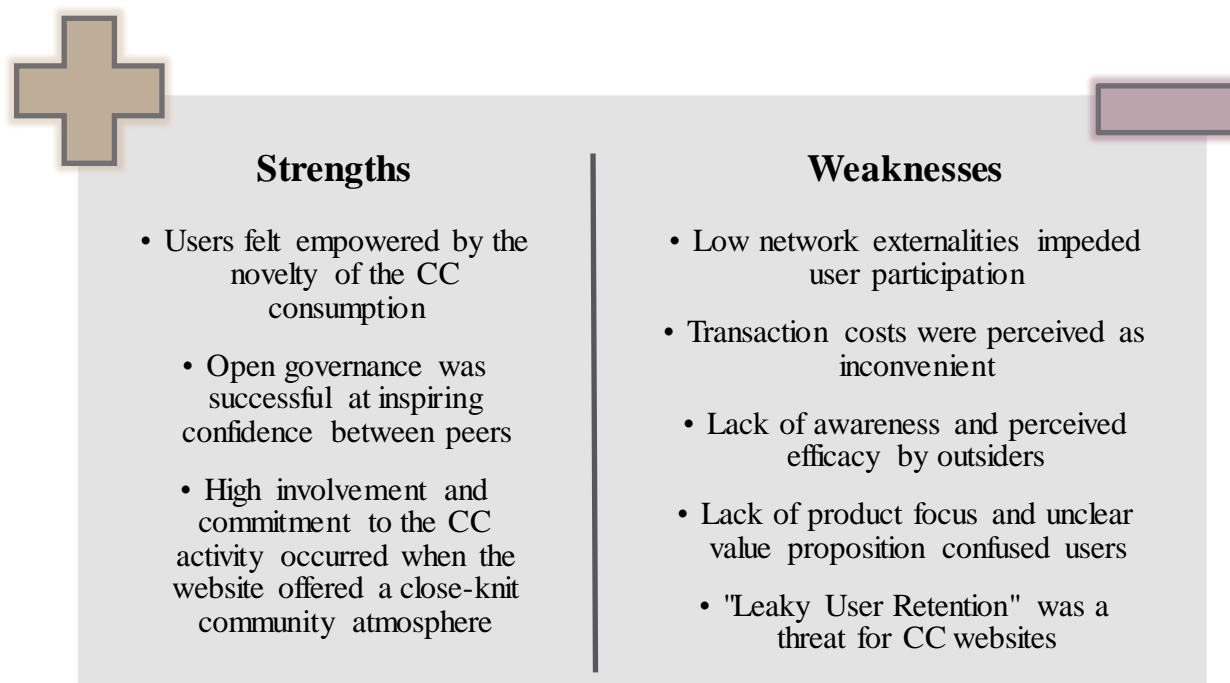
## 5.2 Managerial Implications

Pragmatism suggests research should be conducted to explore answers and solutions for future stakeholders, or as Laudan (1977, p. 11) parsimoniously stated, “Science is fundamentally the solving of problems.” Thus, I now turn to the main implications for P2P renting and swapping website managers with an analysis of the CC environment (5.2.1); and enabling factors to guide future website design and implementation (5.2.2).

### 5.2.1 An Analysis of the CC Environment

My interviews suggest CC websites have a number of potential strengths and capabilities that benefit users. However, they also have weaknesses threatening the success of swapping and renting between peers. These are summarised in **Figure 5.2**.

**Figure 5.2** Suggested Strengths and Weaknesses of P2P Renting and Swapping Websites.



**Strengths.** Respondents expressed appreciation for the novelty of swapping and renting as a unique and fun experience. The general consensus was that swapping and renting “made sense” and

“ticked all the boxes” (i.e., users felt empowered to take control of wasted resources, gain economic savings, engage in social interaction, and as an added bonus, their political concerns were addressed and they could help others).

When I probed respondents for problems or issues with the websites and asked them of their least favourite aspects of swapping/renting, most replied they were satisfied and had no suggestions. For example, a common topic of conversation was building “trust between strangers,” but as exemplified in Section 4.3.5.1, “open governance” was working. Even when swapping users experienced negative reciprocity, they still felt everyone was “pretty honest,” and all of the swappers who had been swaplifted said they were still satisfied and continued to participate. Although many rental respondents held fears of being cheated, I found no evidence of the rental commons being exploited, either from my interviews, the popular press, or in the literature.

Swapping websites with a specific product focus (e.g., books and clothing) were heavily used, with the majority of respondents logging on more than once a day and feeling the benefits of a close-knit community atmosphere. Although most rental respondents had little experience with renting objects, Tara as a website founder revealed an interesting finding on her website’s level of involvement:

“We were expecting to have more members at this stage, but we were expecting to have processed less transactions, so we’ve actually got, with less members, we have more transactions processed!”

This finding suggests CC websites may also be able to claim the benefit of attaining highly committed users who become more involved over time.

**Weaknesses.** Although swapping websites were used daily by swapping “user” respondents,<sup>126</sup> many P2P renting websites were becoming virtual ghost towns. Desired rental Takers said there were not any interesting things to rent and there was nothing worthy on the site to spend time browsing. These insufficient network externalities (e.g., Katz & Shapiro, 1986; Mahler & Rogers; Song & Walden, 2007) impeded users from finding nearby items they wanted to rent, causing Desired rental Providers to complain that no one had yet requested their items. Thus, as evidenced from P2P renting

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<sup>126</sup> With the exception of Desired swapping user Richard who was a non-user – who had listed a total of 27 items and had not had any success with finding an exchange partner. His lack of success can be attributed to the swapping website he belonged to having low network externalities (e.g., there had been less than 10 swaps conducted on the website at the time of my interview), as well as only offering generic objects (i.e., this was the only swapping website used by one of my respondents which had a complete lack of product-focus).



websites and the unfocused swapping website used by Richard (non-user), the most challenging weakness of CC websites is an insufficient level of network externalities impeding Desired users from participating. This may particularly impede desired Providers, as Murphy and Liao's (2013) study on eBay revealed the "market efficiency" of high network externalities was a major factor for choosing to sell online.

Insufficient network externalities were also caused by a general lack of awareness about P2P renting and swapping websites. For example, many respondents complained their friends had never heard of these consumption options and were sometimes unsure or unwilling to participate. This may be an indication swapping and renting websites were primarily being used by innovators and early adopters, similar to van de Glind's (2013) finding CC users in Amsterdam being "more socially forward" and motivated by "curiosity" (p. 19). This finding suggests CC websites lacking in "social proof" (e.g., John, 2013) may be a barrier to participation.

Further, social norms against sharing, second-hand goods, and access-based consumption may impede users from participating. For example, Rexfelt and Ornäs (2009) suggested rental Takers can be difficult to attract because they are accustomed to ownership and are hesitant to shift towards temporary access without prior rental experiences. This was confirmed by many respondents, who often said they found it difficult to rewire their instinct to buy rather than rent.

Even when respondents professed a willingness and desire to participate in P2P renting, many users attributed the transaction costs to be too high for the benefits gained. Thus, the high levels of *Consumer Involvement* required by users was a weakness of many P2P rental websites (discussed in Section 4.3.6). Geographic distance further added to the efforts involved in a rental transaction. As discussed in the "Type of Transferred Object" dimension (Section 4.2.2.1), perceived inconvenience diminished with the item's worth, as many participants stated they perceived P2P renting as being too much of a hassle only for 'smaller ticket items'. This finding is similar to the research of Denegri-Knott and Molesworth (2009), who found a tremendous amount of work was required by sellers to dispose of possessions on eBay, which may not be invested in lower value items. High transaction costs and low flexibility sometimes led users to bypass the website and connect directly with an exchange partner. Thus, another threat to CC websites is the potential for Leaky User Retention (discussed in Section 4.6.3), where many users were leaving the website to collaborate and create their own swapping/renting network.

Finally, CC websites without a clear product focus were strongly criticised by respondents. Although flexibility was often sought for Providing and Taking more things to swap or rent (as well as

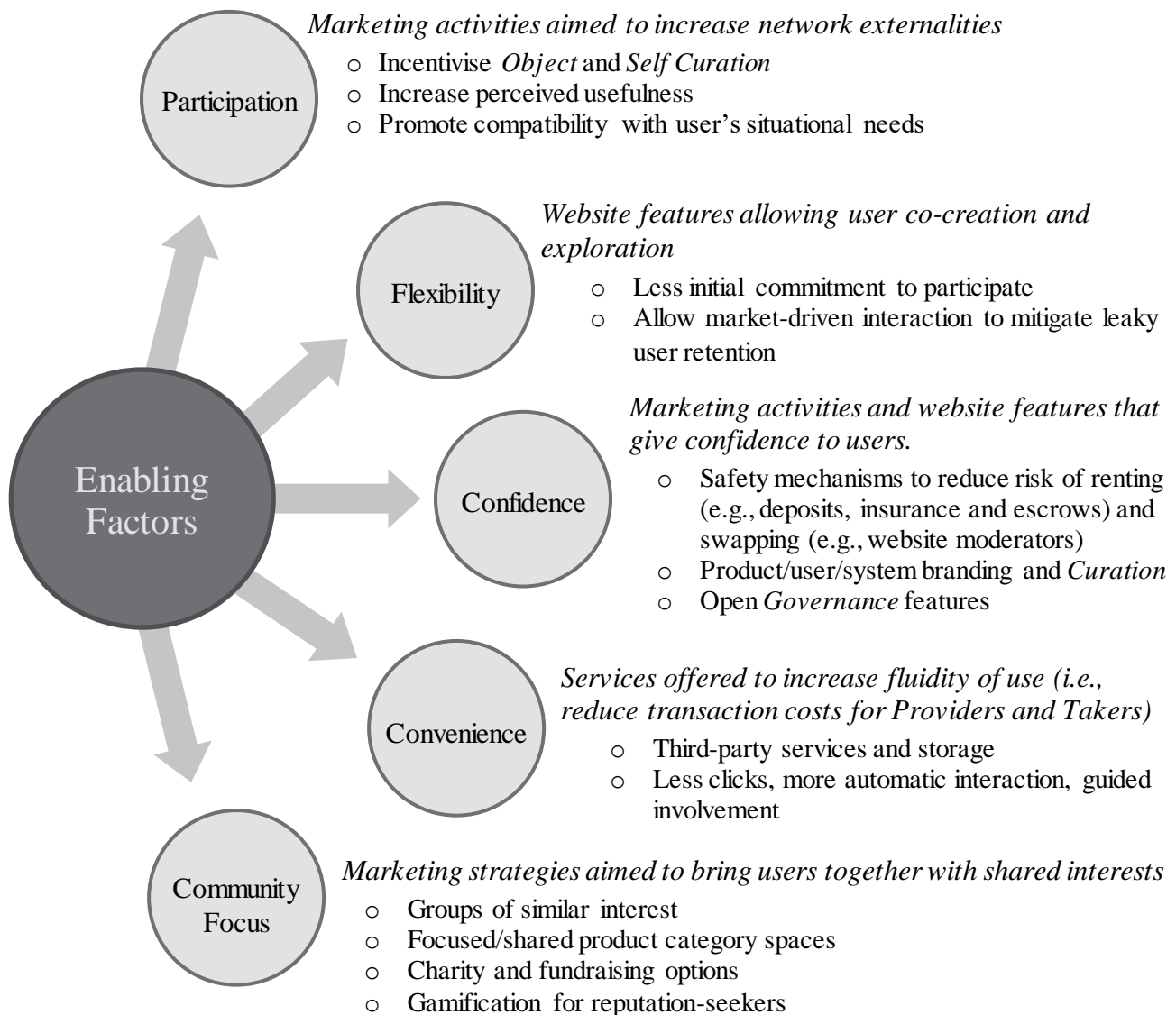
sell or give away), many also cautioned the website should show a clear value proposition. For example, many swapping Providers thought the items they listed for swap should match the desired objects of the community. Thus, swapping users had normalised what types of objects were acceptable to offer (things that were being requested and posted by others in the community) and what types of objects were unacceptable (e.g., “weird” or random things that did not match the swapping website’s product focus). Meanwhile, many rental Providers complained the rental websites they used had no guidance on what types of objects were in demand to rent, so they had no idea where to start. Rental respondents therefore criticised websites that said “list anything, rent anything” for being too broad. These findings support Anderson’s (2014) review of 45 failed CC startups, where two of the top five failure characteristics were a “lack of product focus” and “unclear value proposition.”

## 5.2.2 Enablers of Collaborative Consumption

My interviews exposed a number of strategies that may help address the threats and weaknesses inhibiting the success of CC websites. Although the specific suggestions and reasons discussed by respondents differed between renting and swapping, the underlying themes overlapped. I therefore suggest five enabling factors for CC in general: (1) Participation; (2) Flexibility; (3) Confidence; (4) Convenience; and (5) Community Focus. These enablers (as shown in **Figure 5.3**) should be used to guide managers of CC websites in creating marketing messages and implementing website features.

**Participation.** Yen, Hsu and Huang (2011, p. 92) claimed “despite increasing enthusiasm for online communities, many fail because of an insufficient number of active contributors,” indicating “the success of online communities greatly depends on the *participation* [emphasis added] of their members.” A critical mass of exchange partners and transferrable objects is crucial, as many non-users said they would be willing to participate if items had been available. Participation is therefore of critical importance to the success of CC websites, especially when it comes to profitability (e.g., Zeng & Reinartz, 2003). CC managers should focus on increasing users’ perceived usefulness (e.g., Shwarz & Chin, 2007) and compatibility with the website (e.g., Taylor & Todd, 1995b) to inspire trial.

Managers of swapping and renting websites should focus on attracting Providers and encouraging involvement with *Object Curation*. For example, websites could offer services or incentives for Providers who post pictures. For example, a few points-based swapping websites offered new users a free “point” for posting their first listing, and one clothing rental website offered a service where Providers could pay a small fee to have a professional photographer do a fashion photo shoot with their clothes, and the pictures would then be automatically posted to the website as available objects for rent.

**Figure 5.3** Enablers of Collaborative Consumption.

Another way to increase participation is by considering the difference between *Individual Decision-Making Strategies* being guided by *Situational* choices of consumption mode (i.e., acquisition versus disposition). For example, rental Providers were spontaneous with their decision to temporarily dispose items, while swapping Providers were often more planned and systematic with their decision to purge. For this reason, I found no issues with swapping Providers engaging in *Object Curation*. However, my findings suggest rental websites should put less pressure on Providers with listing items, and place more requirements of *Object Curation* in the hands of Desired Takers. Although many rental websites offered “Wanted Ads” by Takers, most rental Providers missed these opportunities because the website never sent out a direct request to ask Providers if they had these items available.

Rental Takers were most often planned and systematic with their decision to temporarily acquire goods because they needed the object for a specific purpose and exact time period. This made timing of communication a critical factor, as many rental Takers said their requests had fallen through when the Provider did not get their message in time. Websites should offer more synchronous communication features to ensure users are able to get in touch. Situational factors that inspire swapping/renting usage should therefore be considered when designing the roles Providers and Takers are expected to adopt with consumer involvement.

**Flexibility.** Examples of this enabler were discussed in Section 4.3.6. Most respondents agreed CC websites needed to be wary with “controlled governance” (e.g., Keymolen, 2013). Building a trustworthy community was important, but my interviews pointed to flexibility of co-creation (i.e., to increase user convenience and allow lower involvement efforts when there was a lower level of risk or attachment to the object) as paramount to increasing consumer involvement. Enabling flexibility ensures websites do not attempt to control interactions between peers, but rather allow users to develop and contribute to the website, fostering feelings of community ownership (e.g., Lin & Lu, 2011; Wiertz & de Ruyter, 2007).

**Confidence.** Although the most common strategy for CC websites has been to build trust between users (e.g., Botsman & Rogers, 2011; Petri et al., 2011), my findings suggest the issue of the commons has more to do with risk. Even when trust was given between users, respondents repeatedly held concerns for negative reciprocity, indicating that trust between strangers is unable to reduce uncertainty in the exchange. Instead of focusing only on “trust” between strangers, managers of CC websites should strive to co-produce *confidence* (e.g., Chantelant & Vignal, 2005) with Providers and Takers. Building confidence reduces the vulnerability of dealing with strangers by offering solutions and contingencies for instances of failed cooperation.

Overcoming perceptions of risk in use is one key consideration for P2P renting. Although most rental websites enabled deposits to be taken, this only increases confidence for Providers. As insurance mitigates risk for *both* parties involved (i.e., the Taker paying for accidental damage and the Provider replacing a broken/lost item), P2P rental sites could provide insurance options. Risk was also of concern to swapping respondents, as many users said they wanted the website to get more involved with policing and punishing swaplifters rather than just increasing trust through reputation.

Another way to enable confidence is by branding users, products, and the website itself. For instance, users need to brand themselves as trustworthy to others by the use of feedback and comments, their profile, and the effort they put forth in their communication and online image. Creating

community norms between users is also important, as research suggests negative reciprocity is minimised when individuals place importance on their reputation (e.g., Lindenberg, 2001). Likewise, products need to be branded as items potential Takers would want to swap or rent; comments and feedback on a specific product could increase rentability/swappability, as well as using merchandising techniques like high quality photos. The importance of having high quality photos is confirmed by Shen et al.'s (2011) empirical study on eBay to have a significant impact on auction success.

Lastly, building confidence in the system/website itself can provide users with “a generalised trust belief in the community” of Providers, which Pavlou and Gefen (2004, p. 40) argued was the first determinant of website usage for Takers. CC websites therefore need to brand themselves as trustworthy brokers that provide a safe and engaging place for individuals to gather and exchange items with one another. Lee et al., (2011) found posting successful experiences from other consumers has a positive effect on a consumers' decision to shop online. Thus, having examples of successful transactions should be visible to increase the positive social influence on the website. Seeing successful transactions can also increase a user's perception of how hard it is to use the system, which increases their confidence through self-efficacy; however, this has more to do with making participation *Convenient*.

**Convenience.** The decision to engage in disposition or second-hand acquisition depends on a user's confidence in participating and their *Perceived* “Consumer Involvement” (i.e., how an exchange occurs, how much effort is required to complete an exchange). Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour and Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC) refers to how easily a user perceives an action can be performed. One's intention to do something is influenced by their ‘control beliefs’ about factors that might ease or hinder their execution of a given behaviour. Bandura et al. (1980) tested theories of self-efficacy (as cited in Kalafatis et al., 1999), where they found people are strongly influenced by their perception on how confident they are with regards to expected performance of a given behaviour. The likelihood of temporary or permanent disposition therefore depends on the associated benefits and costs perceived by the would-be Provider. If a Provider views their possession as having ambiguous value-in-disposition, they are more likely to feel an inability to dispose and thus resist getting rid of it (Türe, 2014).

Moeller and Wittkowski (2010) explored consumer preferences for renting from businesses and found non-ownership was positively influenced by consumers' convenience orientation. As this research examined online rental from a peer, rather than from a business, a key question was whether this form of renting could still be perceived as an “inherently convenient form of consumption” (p.

181). From my interviews it became clear that renting from peers was perceived as “hard work” – especially for low involvement objects. Making the website and exchange process convenient and easy is therefore a crucial factor for success.

Managers should first focus on increasing perceptions of self-efficacy (e.g., Taylor & Todd, 1995b) and perceived ease of use (e.g., Venkatesh & Davis, 2000) by making sure users know what the website is used for, how it works, and believe it will be easy to use. This can be done by designing websites with “Fluidity of Use” (Manzini & Francois, 2008), where stages of participation are “automagic,” easy, and effortless. For example, SwapTree supplies postage stamps for consumers to send items, taking away the inconvenience of having to go to the post office and figure out shipping costs.

Rental respondents often complained of the hassle of travelling too far to meet the user and coordinating a mutually convenient pickup time. In high density urban areas, it might be possible for a third party to provide storage facilities and facilitate exchange logistics, thus reducing the high level of effort required of users and providing storage utility for those who rent out (Lamberton & Rose, 2012). Consider an existing example, eBay drop off stores “often use the consignment model of selling [...] for consigners who lack the time or expertise to sell on eBay” (Chu & Liao, 2007, p. 179), which could be adapted for renting between peers.

**Community Focus.** Cheung and Lee (2009) defined commitment in online communities as “a sense of emotional involvement with the online community, which is characterised by identification with, *involvement in* and emotional attachment to the community” (p. 283). Thus, my final CC enabler has to do with making users more committed to the website community, other users, and involvement throughout the exchange.

Although most respondents appreciated the social contact and subsequent friendships formed from their use of P2P renting and swapping websites, this was never given as an influential primary motivation to their involvement. Groomes and Seyfang’s (2012, p. 20) survey of Freegle users likewise found meeting new people was *not* an influential factor of Freegle usage even though friendships were often formed. Although friendship-seeking was not a *motivation* to swap or rent, these friendships often kept users more *satisfied* with their experience. CC websites should therefore encourage social interaction, as my findings from Section 4.5.2 confirmed “faceless and fleshless” online communities (DeGraff et al., 2001, p. 61) pose disadvantageous to users. CC managers should aim to create “avid users” who are relationship-oriented rather than transaction-oriented (Ye, Viswanathan, & Hann, 2014, p. 9). This can be done by reducing interpersonal anonymity.

Decreasing spatial and interpersonal anonymity (i.e., by creating website features for *Self Curation*) can potentially increase Provider gratification. For example, one topic of conversation that crossed over between swapping and renting was the idea of encouraging the Taker to post pictures of them using the object (i.e., making an online place to map the trajectory of the rental/swapping object being used with various users in various places). Potentially, this idea may be a way to increase Takers' psychological ownership as well as engage in conspicuous consumption without permanent ownership (i.e., the memory and proof of using the object is permanently displayed in a public space).

CC websites should offer a clear focus to bring the website community close together. Managers of P2P renting websites should start with a geographic focus, because one of the biggest deterrents for rental respondents was high transaction costs. This can be reduced by making sure everyone is in a convenient proximity to each other. Marketing efforts should focus on amplifying the critical mass in one geographic location. For example, rental respondent Ariel said the website she used created flyers for rental Providers to print out of their items which they could locally post around to other people's letterboxes and increase awareness in their area.

Most rental websites used by respondents were offering catchall product categories so there was nothing for the community to come together and get involved as likeminded and enthusiastic consumers. The more successful<sup>127</sup> rental websites I came across during this study had a niche product category like clothing, outdoor adventure gear, party equipment, and photography (or were geographically focused). This emphasis allows users to get involved about the actual product and engage in conversations – perhaps a necessary component for lowering the perception of P2P renting as “hard work.” This proposition goes in line with my swapping findings, where most respondents perceived the “hard work” of second-hand exchange worth their efforts because they were heavily involved in the offered product categories and enjoyed participating in the swapping community. Thus, swapping respondents thought of it more as “fun work” because it was socially engaging and offered routine hedonic stimulation.

Research suggests although sustainability may not be a direct motivation for CC participation, perceived sustainability of a CC activity can affect user's attitude and subsequent enjoyment of the practice (therefore giving users a feeling of political empowerment). For example, Hamari et al.'s (2015) empirical study found sustainability had a significant positive effect on user attitudes toward CC websites. With this in mind, marketers should promote the political benefits of swapping and renting, as most respondents perceived their participation consistent with their anti-materialistic and

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127 I.e., still active, haven't shut down since this research commenced.

anti-waste values. Although most users were not labelled as *actively* concerned political consumers, many respondents believed those without political concerns would reconsider their values after experiencing benefits of the CC movement (discussed in Section 4.7.3). Websites should therefore create messages showing how renting and swapping can allow users to consume more sustainably (i.e., less wastefully), and more humanly (i.e., helping other individuals). These messages should also be individually tailored to each user's contribution<sup>128</sup> to encourage reputation-seeking between users.

As many respondents sought social connections through their participation, competitive game mechanics may be a way to increase interaction and reputation-seeking between users. Thus, another strategy to instil community focus is gamification, defined as the integration of "game mechanics into non-game environments to increase audience engagement, loyalty and fun" (Corrigan & Miller, 2011, p. 14). In this study, many rental respondents thought gamification might increase their participation and feelings of commitment to the community. While it may not appeal to everyone, gamification helps address the desire of many respondents who echoed two-way rental user Earl's comment, "I'm always looking for time to waste on the Internet."

Hamari et al.'s (2015) research suggested that CC websites without an established set of norms or strong user ties could reduce the expected effect of "reputation-seeking" having a positive effect on attitude or behavioural intention to use CC websites. Indeed, rental respondents spoke of no shared website norms and were not concerned about how they looked to other users on the website (suggesting weak network ties). However, gamification may inspire reputation-seeking, where users increase their involvement with the website because they want to feel recognition from others.

When online users create community norms (e.g., Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), their reputation on the site starts to depend on following these norms (e.g., Hars & Ou, 2001; Wasko & Faraj, 2005). My findings confirm this expectation, as many swapping respondents were often influenced by how they would look to other users through their involvement with the site (e.g., concerned about their reputation of being a "nice person," a heavy contributor to the forums, etc.). Websites should therefore encourage user-generated *Ritual Normalisation* as a way to keep user ties strong. Monitoring user rituals and subsequently marketing them throughout the website is one example (e.g., Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). This concludes my recommendations for managers to focus on five enabling factors of CC websites. Next, I close my discussion with a reflection of this thesis' academic contributions, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

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<sup>128</sup> For example, websites could give users a dashboard of statistics to show how many transactions they have completed as well as estimates of their political impact. Providers can be reminded of how many objects they have prevented from going in a landfill, while Takers can be shown how many objects they have intercepted from the landfill.



## 5.3 Research Reflection

“Reflection is a mental activity aimed at investigating one’s own action in a certain situation and involving a review of the experience, an analysis of causes and effects, and the drawing of conclusions concerning future action” (Hoyrup, 2004, p. 442).

Ingram & Winch (2004) conceived research “without reflection” makes “any possible learning [...] evaporate,” and is therefore an imperative process for educational contexts (Mezirow, 1998). Boud et al. (1985) defined three steps necessary for reflection: (1) Re-examine preliminary experiences, which can then be applied to (2) Separate positive and negative feelings so learning can be unbiased; and (3) Use hindsight for future gains. While considering the four dimensions of data appraisal introduced in Section 3.3.4 (Finlay, 2006), these elements of reflection are discussed in the next three sections: **Contributions** (5.3.1); **Limitations** (5.3.1), and **Suggestions for Future Research** (5.3.3).

### 5.3.1 Research Reflection: Limitations

Upon reflection, my research project comes with two main limitations. These primarily concern my review of the literature and issues with sampling.

When I started this research in 2010, the literature describing “Collaborative Consumption” was sparse and non-existent beyond informal conjectures about the CC economy from articles in the popular press. Although it was fast becoming a popular topic for researchers, I mostly found articles and blogs about access-based consumption for cars and accommodation (rather than household goods). Studies on swapping and bartering were sparingly available, but few focused on individual experiences (businesses and economic theories were the main point of focus), and even fewer focused on website facilitated swapping. There were no studies on P2P renting or swapping websites. This was initially beneficial, as it guided me to choose a phased literature review approach and ask the grounded theory question of “what do we have here?” However, after commencing my data collection, research articles regarding the CC economy have dominated the research scene for second-hand consumption. Like drinking from a fire hydrant, keeping up to date with these daily publications has been challenging and I am likely to have let many relevant studies slip through my fingers.

Although I have not come across any studies which I believe would have changed my findings, with the hindsight of knowing CC would become so popular, I would have planned more heavily with what factors to pick and choose from with new sources and been more vigilant in staying on track with my integrative literature review. In order to mitigate this limitation, I have remained active with my review of the literature long after my findings had been written and synthesised. From this latter review of the literature, I have attempted to integrate the findings from these studies into my thesis discussion throughout, and remained reflective for future research topics which I have not explored.

My second limitation concerns my final sample of respondents. CC motivations are likely to vary across product industries (e.g., Balck & Cracau, 2015; Wagner, 2013). Because I did not focus on one industry type, there may be a bias because I kept my sample frame broadly focused on all swapping and renting websites (excluding cars and accommodation). I have attempted to get around this bias by not focusing on the product category with respondents and asking them more general questions during interviews.

Further, my struggle to find valid respondents indicates this broadness may have been a necessity, as my access to willing respondents was spread thin, even with financial incentives. Additionally, although many people initially responded to my research requests, too many had no experience with P2P renting; they wanted to use it, but no one had rented from them or it had not worked out. Indeed, the total number of transactions over a two-year period for one rental website was said by its founder to be fewer than 300, suggesting a low critical mass. Because rental website usage was limited, users who *had* rented out/in still did not have a large amount of experience, and therefore more hypothetical questions had to be explored than was preferred. Meanwhile, for swapping, I had the opposite challenge of finding non-users, because the majority of users who had posted an item for swap had been successful compared to renting (based on my observation of user profiles).

Additionally, there may have been a bias toward Providers with recruitment for the websites that did not have the overall user-base visible (I could only contact Providers who had posted items to swap or rent out, or Takers who had left feedback for Providers) because Takers and Non-users were not public. Although I tried to overcome this constraint by sending out requests through other mediums (e.g., Facebook pages, YouTube videos, or blogs that discussed P2P renting/online swapping), Takers and Non-users remained relatively hidden behind the scenes. This limitation is acknowledged as a major influence to my final sample. Specifically, were Providers the more dominant user-type as a few of my key informant founders suggested, or did the lower response from one-way Taker respondents arise because I was constrained by the website's functionality? Without being able to directly contact Takers I was unable to fully explore these questions.

Ultimately, “if a piece of research is to be evaluated it *needs to be evaluated on its own terms*” (Finlay, 2006, p. 12). My research aimed to provide a better understanding of online swapping and P2P renting. These consumption activities were during the time of my research in a constant state of flux: P2P renting websites were rapidly being absorbed by B2C rental company users, shutting down, or changing formats; in contrast, swapping websites seemed to be flourishing in the entertainment and fashion sectors.<sup>129</sup> Whether they look similar 5-10 years from now remains to be discovered, but looking at the changes from 2008 to 2015, I believe my findings lay on an ideographic frame where time and context must be considered. The insights from this thesis may be considered as a snapshot, useful for reflection on future CC transformations and adaptations. Glaser and Strauss (1967) said a good grounded theory should exhibit “modifiability” so I expect my findings need to be modified as P2P renting and swapping continue to change in the future. This idea is also supported from a critical realist standpoint which requires future researchers “to collect further data that helps to distinguish among alternative explanations” and relies on “the community of researchers to debate them thoroughly” (Easton, 2010, p. 123). Thus, my analysis and resulting findings should not be evaluated as a *final* universal theory, but as a pathway to guide future inquiries and modifications. I therefore close my discussion with ideas for future research.

### 5.3.2 Research Reflection: Contributions

Botsman and Rogers’ (2010) introduction of “Collaborative Consumption,” has sparked a growing body of research, but the terminology around this “sharing economy” has been confused with conflicting parameters and definitions. My review of the literature has addressed this issue by offering a comprehensive look at the main disparities: (1) Access or Ownership; (2) Centralised or Dichotomous-peer-to-peer exchange; and (3) Market-mediated or Non-market-mediated exchange. Supporting Hamari et al.’s (2015, p. 4) definition, I reasoned that CC should be centred on *P2P exchange* that encompasses both *access and ownership* models, and can be mediated by both *market and non-market* mechanisms. This conceptualisation provides a solid foundation to place existing CC examples within future research studies.

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<sup>129</sup> These factors are stated in hindsight to my research rather than as pre-understanding. It was only after I started to immerse myself in the interviews and data collection that I came to realise P2P renting websites were dangerously low on network externalities. For more information, see Appendix C for a brief overview of websites in existence during this research.

My research adds to the literature of consumption in the second-hand world. Although research on peer-to-peer consumption has explored a wide range of *offline* settings, the rise in Collaborative Consumption has sparked recent attention into *online* second-hand contexts. However, this has mostly covered auction websites like eBay (e.g., Clausen et al., 2010).

Although research on renting has been rich with insight, this is one of the first studies to examine renting from the perspective of individual consumers who choose to rent their everyday household possessions (i.e., as opposed to cars or homes) to peers. Meanwhile, the literature on swapping consumption has been mostly neglected, and this research has therefore addressed this gap. In particular, my analysis has revealed the motivations for swapping and renting as well as potential enabling factors for the successful implementation of CC website design and usage.


Further, user categories are often jumbled together under one user perspective when discussing CC motivations and experiences. Through my research findings I have stressed the importance of dichotomising Provider and Taker roles. CC research has sometimes distinguished between Providers and Takers; however Durif et al. (2014) argued second-hand consumption has primarily been researched from a Taker perspective of motivations and deterrents to *buy* (e.g., Roux and Guiot, 2008). Although recent research has started noticing the Provider perspective, these have primarily focused on Permanent Disposition through selling (e.g., Durif et al., 2014; Lemaitre & de Barnier, 2013; Murphy & Liao, 2013) and giving for free (e.g., Guillard & Bucchia, 2012a; Nelson & Rademacher, 2009), rather than swapping or renting. My research therefore contributes to the literature by exploring *both* Provider and Taker perspectives of two understudied modes of consumption.

Through my analysis, I have broadened Bardhi and Eckhardt's (2012) dimensions so their influence can be expanded beyond "the Field of Access" (p. 884) to *the Field of Collaborative Consumption*. I have offered four influences for the type of transferred object, three phases of consumer involvement, three considerations for temporality, potential drawbacks and benefits of spatial and interpersonal anonymity, and conceptual maps for market mediation and political consumerism. These dimensions should be considered for all types of second-hand exchange.

Resonating with previous research (e.g., Binninger et al., 2015; Devinney et al., 2010; Gleim et al., 2013; Markkula et al., 2012; Ozanne & Ballantine, 2010), my findings suggest political concerns are secondary to individual motivations for consumption. Economic and practical utility were still primary considerations for participants, consistent with other research examining access-based consumption (e.g., Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2012).

Finally, my research findings guided me to create “A Model of Theoretical Perspectives,” which contributes to the literature on methodology and critical realism. This theoretical diagram provides a framework for theorists to explore phenomena through different manifestations and layers of reality. Although I used Bardhi and Eckhardt’s (2012) dimensions for my exploration (Section 5.1.1), any type of referential dimension can be applied to this framework, leaving it modifiable for future researchers to adapt (See **Table 5.10**, showing potential theories that may apply).

**Table 5.10** Framework for “A Theoretical Model of Perspectives.”

	Perceived Reality	Desired Reality	Actual Reality
	<i>Judgments of the manifestation</i>	<i>Aspirations of the manifestation</i>	<i>Actions of the manifestation</i>
What	Perceived Usefulness Compatibility	Task Definition	
How	Perceived Behavioural Control Perceived Ease of Use Self-efficacy Locus of Control Learned Helplessness Theory	Task Environment	Level of Involvement
When	Temporal Perspectives	Temporal Influences	
Who	Cloak of Anonymity Deindividuation Looking-glass self Vicarious Learning	Normative Influences	Group Attribution Error Groupthink Weak Ties Theory Politeness Theory
Where	Physical Surroundings Spatial Cognition	Spatial Influences	Network Externalities
Why	Equity Theory Antecedent States Elaboration Likelihood Model	Acquired Needs Theory Theory of Reasoned Action	Classical and Operant Conditioning

### 5.3.3 Research Reflection: Suggestions for Future Research

My research may offer insights for further investigation, such as: (1) Exploring different types of Non-users; (2) Finding the actual political effect of CC websites; (3) Experimenting with enabling factors; (4) Finding ways to increase user confidence; (5) Considering geographic/cultural comparisons; (6) Exploring P2P created collaboration; (7) Collecting website usage statistics; and (8) Potential variables to investigate.

**Non-users.** In hindsight, I would have considered splitting Non-users into two groups: (1) people who signed up for the website but have not had a chance to use it or chose not to use it (i.e. changed mind); and also (2) people who had not signed up for the site, genuine non-users. This would allow the introduction of completely hypothetical situations and a game of devil's advocate for every question to try and get a response. Including these genuine non-users could give more insight into why P2P renting and online swapping has not received enough awareness and why outsiders may be weary to become involved.

**Political Effect.** Although many users were either motivated or satisfied by political consumerism, there has been limited research on the quantified effect of CC activities (e.g., Schor, 2014). This lack of evidence may be inhibiting the potential growth of CC websites. For example, a weakness for many CC website start-ups is a lack of funding (Anderson, 2014). Many key informants said they did not have enough resources, as rental founder Tara explained, "since we're still so new, proving our social and environmental effect is really difficult, [...] that stitches us out of potentially lots of governmental funding where you have to be able to say exactly what you can help or do." Tara's comment entails a demand for research on whether or not P2P second-hand exchange is more sustainable and socially refining as is predicted (e.g., Botsman & Rogers, 2010; Luchs et al., 2011; Phipps et al., 2013; Prothero et al., 2011), and if so, by how much. Although there have been studies comparing commercial renting and ownership's effects on sustainability (e.g., Hirschl, Konrad, & Scholl, 2003; Mont, 2008a; Tukker, 2004; Tukker & Tischner, 2006), as well as swapping (Luchs et al., 2011) and carsharing (Martin & Shaheen, 2010), these types of studies have not focussed on the type of mass-sharing between peers that CC conveys (Binninger et al., 2015).

Further, the question remains whether these profits fuel further consumption activity (e.g., Bolton et al., 2006; Phipps et al., 2013), as others have found with the sale of possessions on eBay (e.g., Denegri-Knott & Molesworth, 2009) and offline second-hand markets (e.g., Kursten, 1991;

Scitovsky, 1994). Determining the actual political impact of CC activities is important so that transformational researchers can focus on viable pathways to improve political, environmental, and/or social sustainability.

**Enabling Factors.** Additionally, it would be advantageous for the progress of P2P renting to test how enabling factors, motivations, and deterrents are having an effect on behaviour and satisfaction. For example, it would be interesting to look at effects on how many times a product is likely to be provided/taken, how much money users are willing to pay, and how much time is invested. Smaller (e.g., case) studies might centre on the actual business viability of a storage/drop-off third party P2P rental model, and whether or not charity and group options might foster greater involvement and lead to socially refining behaviours.

**Confidence.** Building confidence to exchange objects between strangers is still an area in need of further inquiry. There have been a number of studies based on auction C2C trust (e.g., Jeon, Crutsinger, & Kim, 2008; Shen et al., 2009), but the findings from this research suggest P2P rentals and swaps carry a different type of trust embedded in “risk of use.” Further research on ways to enable “confidence” (Chantelant & Vignal, 2005) specifically for this type of system would be beneficial, especially if this practice grows in scope. One such example that came up in this research was the idea of “universal trust partnerships” with various websites. This could be a hypothetical experiment to simulate. Further, identifying strategies for governance can help instil user confidence that if something goes wrong there are contingencies to fix the problem (rather than just leaving negative feedback so future users veer away from the untrustworthy user).

**Geographic/Cultural Comparisons.** As I focused on users located in urban English speaking cities, no notable cultural differences were detected between countries. However, through my search for P2P renting and swapping websites, I found many examples of websites in other countries (e.g., Singapore, Germany, Denmark) that were possibly being implemented more successfully (i.e., not shutting down, high user base and activity on homepage). It is unclear whether this is due to a lag in the timeline of start-ups compared to the cities I studied or if there is a fundamental difference between these locations. Future research should compare other countries who have successfully implemented P2P renting websites to discover what cultural, political and structural aspects may foster or impede P2P rental and swapping exchange.

**P2P Created Collaboration.** Through my research, I found instances where renting and swapping users were bypassing the CC website and had started their own networking page (as a form

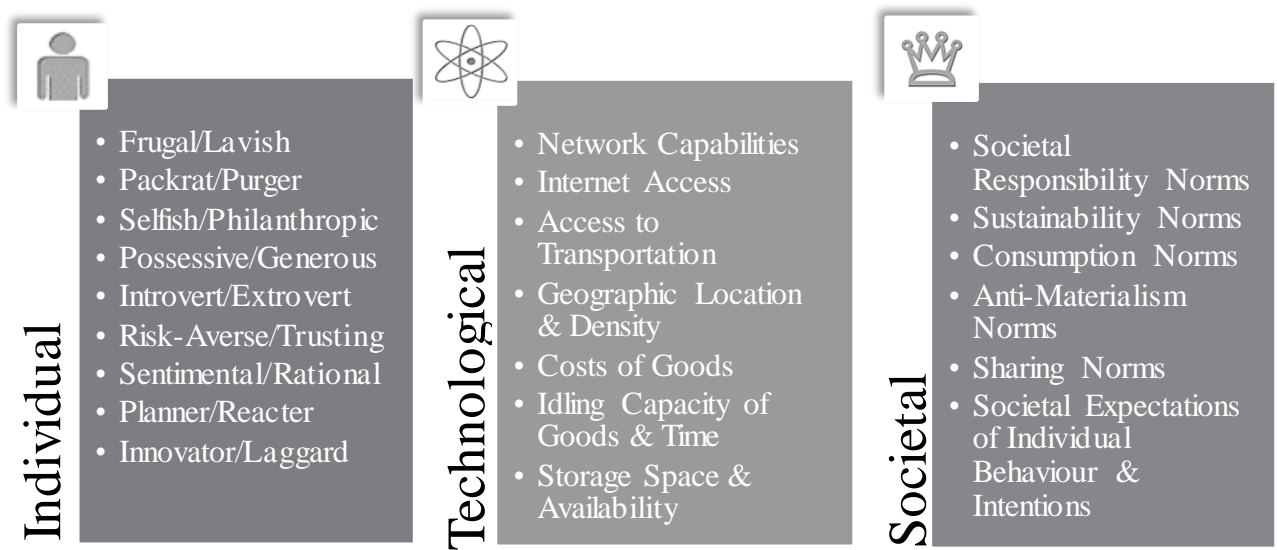
of “Leaky User Retention”). For renting, this activity was rare (I found less than 50 Facebook and Reddit pages). However, for swapping I found over four hundred cases of Reddit, Facebook, and Pinterest pages as well as online forums fostering swapping of miniatures, games, music, movies, stamps, and postcards (all of which may be argued as collectibles), as well as fashion items such as clothing, shoes, makeup, and nail polish. To the best of my knowledge, organically formed CC networks have yet to be investigated by researchers. Even buying and selling on Facebook has been heavily neglected (Jiao, 2015; Toivanen, 2015), which is surprising when considering the innumerable pages devoted to second-hand exchange. This hidden world of P2P-created Collaborative Consumption is worthy of exploration, especially as CC managers would like to reduce cases of leaky user retention.

**Website Usage Statistics.** Future studies should compare nomothetic data between CC-Types and User-Types for the six referential dimensions, such as: (1) Types of objects most commonly listed, browsed for, provided, and taken; (2) Transaction costs of consumer involvement stages; (3) Time spent on the website to browse, list, lurk, or contribute information, number of transactions completed, and time-lapse between reciprocity and communication; (4) Levels of spatial and interpersonal anonymity; (5) Instances of positive, neutral, balanced, or negative contribution and reciprocity; and (6) Messages of political consumerism diffused through the website, types of political concerns, and strength of activism by users.

I also suggest identifying demographics (e.g., age, income, community interest, attitudes, urban density, internet usage – level of involvement with other P2P sites) for the distinct user-groups (Provider, Taker, Two-way user, Non-user) to better segment this emerging market according to the six dimensions. For example, are politically motivated users likely to be more educated, younger, and female – as previous research would predict (e.g., Berkowitz & Lutterman, 1998; Bourgeois & Barnes, 1979; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Webster, 1975)? What types of users are more likely to exhibit positive, negative, or balanced generosity? Who is most concerned about risk (and what type, social or individual)? Which user-type is most prevalent on the website?

**Potential Variables to Investigate.** As a closing point for future research, **Figure 5.4** summarises potential variables that could be further investigated by quantitative studies of online swapping and P2P renting websites. I would suggest exploring these influences and their effect within different layers and manifestations of reality. For example, how does a person’s values of sustainability (an individual manifestation) affect their perception of the website’s political impact (a technological manifestation)? How do social norms within the website (a societal manifestation) affect a user’s perceptions of political consumerism, their resulting level of involvement, satisfaction, and so forth?



**Figure 5.4** Potential Variables to Investigate.

**Individual Influences** may include a person's attitudes and perceptions of time pressure (e.g., Lumpkin, 1985; Lumpkin & Darden, 1982), possessiveness (e.g., Belk, 1984; 1985), aversion to unused utility (e.g., Frost et al., 1995; Price & Ridgway, 1983), propensity to trust (e.g., Fan & Chen, 2005; Gefen, 2000), propensity for variety-seeking (e.g., Donthu & Gilliland, 1996; Donthu & Garcia, 1999), and values of sustainability (e.g., Haws, Winterich, & Naylor, 2010).



**Technological Influences** may include a user's perceived time involvement (e.g., Unni & Roberts, 2012), perceived usefulness of the website and value of the exchange (e.g., Clausen et al., 2010; Sparks, Bradley, & Jennings, 2011), perceptions of network externalities and critical mass (e.g., Seiders et al., 2005; Song & Walden, 2007; Yang, Jun, & Peterson, 2004), and perceived political impact on the environment (e.g., Clark, Kotchen, & Moore, 2003; Shiarella, McCarthy, & Tucker, 2000).



**Societal Influences** may include perceptions of the website community in terms of membership influence and emotional connectedness (e.g., Nielsen, Jex, & Adams, 2000; Plouffe, 2008), or interpersonal benefits (e.g., Gremler, 1995; Jones, Mothersbaugh, & Beatty, 2000). Societal norms may also influence a user's perception of social risks when it comes to making mistakes (e.g., Frost & Gross, 1993) which may hurt the other exchange partner, as well as individual risks (e.g., Frost et al., 1995; Leonard, 2012) being normalised throughout the website.

# Concluding Remarks

I began this research with a naïve agreement to Botsman and Rogers' (2010) vision that CC could change the world. However, by the end of my study I came to gain a sociological imagination which grounded my perception to be in agreement with other arguments (e.g., Dredge & Gyimothy, 2015) that “the commons perspective as nowadays formulated by advocates of Collective Collaborative is *misleadingly utopian*. Technology always brings with it new complexities that need to be dealt with.” (Keymolen, 2013, p. 136).

Technology, through P2P networks, geolocation apps, and synchronous communication, has certainly *enabled* the growth of consumption in the second-hand world. But are enough people ready to actually *transform* their reality to the point of a consumption revolution? Does it really have such disruptive powers and opportunities as Botsman and Rogers envisioned?

Perhaps not (yet?). But as technology continues to weave itself into our everyday lives (i.e., as objects and people become more findable through geo-location tags, search engines, and so forth), access can become more ubiquitous *and* easy (even within “the long tail”). Thus, the “hard work” of P2P exchange can lessen, and perhaps become more appealing.

I look forward to exploring CC spaces and ideas that emerge in the future...

“Like any author, I figured that, when the time came, I’d have a dynamite ending for this book—a great clash of cymbals, a ray of pure sunshine knifing through the clouds (you know), but nothing like that presented itself. [...] There’s no ending in this book at all, [...] because it’s all one hundred percent *beginning* [...].

“But this just means no dynamite ending is going to turn up *here*. The dynamite ending is on the other side of this page and on out past the cover, where the actual revolution is going to take place. The dynamite ending is for *you* to write” (Quinn, 2009, p. 190).

– Daniel Quinn, *Beyond Civilization*

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# Appendix A: University of Canterbury

## Human Ethics Approval

This project met the University of Canterbury's ethics committee standards (Approval for this research can be found in **Figure A.1**). Participants were informed of intended research topics and fully briefed on the purpose of the study and its interview components. Permission was sought to audio tape the interviews.

There was no need for deception, so all questions and discussion were open and honest. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw without penalty at any time from the interviews and surveys. There was almost no risk of physical or psychological harm. There was also no sensitivity with respect to race, gender, sexual orientation, religion or culture as these issues are not a component of this study.

Original interview transcripts in full have remained *confidential* at the request of respondents. Respondents and the websites they belonged to have been kept as anonymous in the final report by using pseudonyms.

## A.1 Approval for Qualitative Research Application

**Figure A.1** Ethics Approval for Qualitative Interviews



# Appendix B: Interview Documents

## B.1 Information Sheet for Interviews

**Figure B.1** Information Sheet for Interview Respondents.

### Information Sheet



#### **Department of Management**

*Researcher: Heather Philip* (heather.philip@pg.canterbury.ac.nz)

*Supervisor: Paul Ballantine* (paul.ballantine@canterbury.ac.nz)

#### **Project Title:**

"Exploring the Providers, Takers, and Non-Users of Peer-to-Peer Renting and Online Swapping"

You are invited to participate as a subject in a research project on the reasons why people participate in collaborative consumption. The aim of this project is to discover and understand the reasons why people choose to rent and swap online to and from peers.

Your involvement in this project will be to participate in an online interview (you will need access to Skype, which can be downloaded at <http://www.skype.com/ind/en-us/get-skype>), with a discussion on the topic of peer-to-peer renting and online swapping. The interview will take approximately one hour. The interview will be audiotaped with your permission, however your name and identity will be removed and only the researcher and supervisor will review these. The audio recording and transcripts will be securely stored for 10 years and then destroyed. You have the right to withdraw from the project at any time, including withdrawal of any information provided.

The results of the project may be published, but you may be assured of the complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation, the identity of participants will not be made public without their consent. To ensure confidentiality, your interview scripts and tapes will be coded so no names will be included in the findings.

This project is being carried out as a requirement for my PhD in Marketing, under the supervision of Paul Ballantine who can be contacted at paul.ballantine@canterbury.ac.nz. He will be pleased to discuss any concerns you may have about your participation in this project.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee low risk process.

Thank you for your time ☺

## B.2 Consent Form for Interviews

**Figure B.2** Information Sheet for Interview Respondents.

### Participant Consent Form



#### **Department of Management**

Researcher: Heather Philip (hep21@ucvive.ac.nz)

Supervisor: Paul Ballantine (paul.ballantine@canterbury.ac.nz)

September/2012

#### **Project Title:**

"Exploring the Providers, Takers, and Non-Users of Peer-to-Peer Renting and Online Swapping"

I have read and understood the description of the above-named project in the Information Sheet provided. On this basis, I agree to participate as a subject in this project, and I consent to the publication of the results of this project with the understanding that my confidentiality will be preserved. I understand and agree to the audiotaping of the interview.

I understand also that I may at any time withdraw from this project, including withdrawal of any information I have provided.

I note that this research has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Management, University of Canterbury.

NAME (please print): .....

Signature:

Date:

---

### B.3 Interview Guide

<p>Tell me about when you first heard about [P2P renting/online swapping].</p>	<p>What were your thoughts and feelings about the concept?</p> <p>What is it that most interested you about it; why did you sign up?</p> <p>Did you see yourself as a [Taker, Provider, both, or none]? Why?</p> <p>If you use other websites like eBay: Do you sell, buy, or both?</p> <p>If different from [P2P renting/ online swapping] inclination, why do you think that is?</p> <p>What did you imagine it to be like?</p> <p>Did you change your views after signing up and using the website? How, why?</p>
<p>Tell me about your involvement with the [P2P renting/online swapping] website.</p>	<p>Describe your most recent, typical, and/or memorable transactions.</p> <p>What would be your best (and worst) experience?</p> <p>What are your most favourite (and least favourite) aspects of [P2P renting/online swapping]?</p> <p>Has anything surprised you in your experiences; was it what you expected?</p> <p>How often do you use the website; and what for?</p> <p>What situations prompt you to want to [rent, provide items to rent out, list items, browse for items, message other users, use the forums, given items away for free (swapping freebies or renting out for charity or community reasons), and other activities]?</p> <p>Do you [and did you] have any concerns about risk and trust? If so, tell me about them and discuss what you do/did to diminish these concerns.</p> <p>[Taker]: Discuss how it is similar (and/or different) if you had rented/swapped the item from a business or borrowed it from a friend/neighbour, swapped for it, bought it second-hand or new, been given it as a gift, etc...</p> <p>[Provider]: Discuss how it is similar (and/or different) if you had sold the item, lent it out to a friend/neighbour, swapped for it, rented it out, or given it away to charity or as a gift, etc...</p> <p>Do you have any friendships or acquaintances that have developed? Tell me about your interactions with other users of the website.</p>
<p>Is there anything that would make it better?</p>	<p>Is there anything missing from the website or community?</p> <p>Is there something that could be improved or added on to the website to make you more inclined to list out your things for rent or browse for items to [rent/swap]?</p> <p>Do you have any complaints about how the system is designed?</p> <p>Are there any services you want to see added to the site to make it better for [list out the respondent's concerns discussed earlier in the interview in terms of bad experiences or least favourite aspects]</p> <p>Is there anything that could be done to make [P2P renting/ online swapping] more your kind of thing?</p> <p>Do you have any suggestions to improve [P2P renting/ online swapping]?</p>

## Appendix C: Overview of CC Websites

In this section I have attempted to compile a list of swapping and renting websites that were in existence through the course of this study. This was especially important because many websites have shut down since my research began. To my knowledge, there was not a comprehensive listing of renting or swapping websites, or a full snapshot of the CC industry available prior to this compilation. Many websites and blogs started posting a running tab of CC websites, but they have not been updated for a few years so were incomplete (e.g., see **Table C.1**).

To find existing websites or forums that were facilitating renting or swapping of everyday items between private individuals I conducted a systematic search through Google, Facebook, Pinterest, Quora, and available CC directories (e.g., Collaborative-Consumption.org, Shareable, the Mesh). **Table C.2** shows the search terms I used of possible product categories and CC formats. My mapping of websites (75 swapping and 69 renting examples) while never comprehensive, should still resemble a findable majority of existing websites, as I went through 100+ pages in Google search for each combination of search terms in **Table C.2**. As a limitation, many non-English examples were excluded because I only searched using English terms.

I also attempted to find information about where these websites operated, when they began, what object category they promoted (i.e. general or specific products), whether they were still active, the number of Facebook likes the company had, how many users they had, how many items were listed and requested, and the number of trades the company had facilitated. Much of the latter information was hidden so my findings are incomplete and often based on rough estimates. To find this information I used the "About Us" page, [www.crunchbase.com](http://www.crunchbase.com), and read through various blogs. For websites which had shut down I utilised [www.archive.org/web](http://www.archive.org/web) to view screenshots of webpages at a point where they were still active in the past. This is a **work in progress** (see **Table C.3**), but hopefully by including some of this information I can offer readers a starting point for finding these types of websites.

Finally, I also include some temporality insights from a survey I conducted from 2014-2015, which included 357 respondents of swapping (288 cases) and renting (69 cases) websites. The findings from these observations are summarised and discussed in the following sections.

**Table C.1** Selected CC Websites Retrieved in 2010 from collaborativeconsumption.com

Product Service Systems			
<b>Peer-to-Peer Car Sharing</b> Whipcar, RelayRides, Drivemycar Rentals, Getaround, Tamyca, Buzzcar, Nachbarschaftsauto	<b>Textbook Rental</b> Chegg, CampusBookRentals, Zookal, BookRenter	<b>Bike sharing</b> Velib, Bixi, Barclays Cycle Hire, B-Cycle, Ecobici, Call-A-Bike, CyclOcity, Niceride, HZ Bike, Social Bicycles	<b>Peer Rental</b> Zilok, Rentoid, Ecomodo, HireThings, Thingloop, Rentalic, RentStuff, Bid & Borrow
<b>Toy Rental</b> Dim Dom, BabyPlays, Rent-a-toy, ToyLib, Speelotheken, Brinquedoteca, Smarty Rents, Toygaroo	<b>Art Rental</b> Art.sy, Artsicle, TurningArt	<b>General Online Rental</b> Rentcycle, AnyHire	<b>Neighbourhood Rental</b> Sharesomesugar, Neighborrow, Neighborgoods, The Sharehood, Frents, Friends With Things, Hey Neighbor!
Redistribution Markets			
<b>Big marketplaces</b> craigslist, eBay, Flippid, Gumtree	<b>Swap sites for books</b> BookHopper, Thebookswap, Paperbackswap, Bookmooch, eBook Fling	<b>Clothing swaps</b> Swapstyle, Clothing Exchange, 99 Dresses, Big Wardrobe, i-Ella, Mano Drabuziai	<b>Neighbourhood Marketplaces</b> Egg Cartel, Zaarly, Garage Sale Trail, Hey, Neighbor!
<b>Free/Gift Exchanges</b> Freecycle, GiftFlow, Givmo, Ziilch, Exchango, Freally, Yoogot, ThingLoop	<b>Swap sites for baby goods and toys</b> Toyswap, thredUp, Swapitbaby, Swapkidsclothes, MumSwap, Tauschteddy	<b>Swap sites for media (Dvd's, books, games)</b> Swap, SwapSimple, Dig N'Swap, Netcyclor, GaBoom, SwapTree, Zunafish, HitFlip, SokoSquare, BarterQuest	<b>Used Electronics</b> Gazelle, eBay Instant Sale, Apple Recycling Program
Collaborative Lifestyles			
<b>Peer-to-Peer Travel</b> Couchsurfing, Airbnb, Roomorama, Crashpadder, One Fine Stay, Bed And Fed, 9flats, iStopover	<b>Storage Networks</b> StorPod, ShareMyStorage	<b>Neighbourhood Support</b> WeCommune, Share Some Sugar, Bright Neighbor, Hey Neighbor!, Streetbank,	<b>Social Lending</b> Zopa, Prosper, The Lending Club, Boober, Maneo, Qifang
<b>Taxi Sharing</b> Taxi2, TaxiDeck, TaxiStop, FellowCab, Weeels	<b>Gardens</b> UrbanGardenShare, Landshare, SharedEarth, YardShare	<b>Co-working Spaces</b> Citizen Space, Hub Culture, The Hub, Vibewire Enterprise Hub, TechHub, NewWorkCity, StudioMates, Bees Office, CoLoft, La Ruche	<b>Social currencies</b> Ven, Quid, TimeBanks, LETSystems, SPICE Timebank
<b>Bartering</b> Barterquest, OurGoods, ITEX, Bartercard, Tourboarding	<b>Skill sharing</b> Brooklyn Skill Share, TeachStreet, TradeSchool, Skillshare, Skilio, WeTeachMe	<b>Co-working Space Finders</b> Loosecubes, DesksNearMe, DeskWanted, CoLoco, OpenDesks, DeskSurfing	<b>Errand &amp; Task Networks</b> TaskRabbit, Zaarly, YourJobDone, AirRun, MyTaskAngel, Gigwalk
<b>CrowdFunding</b> IndieGoGo, Kickstarter, StartSomeGood, Pozible, Crowdcube, Movere.me, Catarse, Profounder	<b>Shared Studios/Workshops</b> 3rd Space Studios, TechShop		<b>Unique Experience Marketplaces</b> Vayable, Gidsy, Sidetour
	<b>Parking spots</b> ParkAtMyHouse, ParkCirca, Park On My Drive		<b>Social Food Networks</b> Gobble, Grub.ly, GrubWithUs, EatWithMe, Wok 'n' Wine, HouseFed



**Table C.2** Search Terms Used to Find CC Websites.

Collaborative Consumption	Online Swapping	P2P Renting
Sharing economy P2P economy Circular economy Collaborative economy Peer economy Peer consumption P2P consumption Connected consumption Digital commons Two-Way Market	Redistribution Market Barter Swap, Swip Swap Trade Share Exchange Stuff for Stuff Moneyless Swish Give and Get ISO (“in search of”)	Product-Service-System Lend Hire Rent Borrow Charter Lease Give Neighbour Share
Types of Goods		
<i>General/Generic</i>	<i>Stuff, things, goods, anything, everything, etc.</i>	
Music	Instruments, band equipment, amps, microphones, etc.	
Travel/Adventure	Camping, hiking, bicycles, kayaking, boating, skiing, snowboarding, sledding, hunting, fishing, etc.	
Fashion	Dresses, suits, clothes, handbags, nail polish, makeup, accessories, jewellery, sunglasses, women's fashion, children's clothes, hand-me-downs, men's fashion, etc.	
Media Entertainment	Books, CDs, DVDs, music, movies, games, board games, miniatures, etc.	
Household	Tools, drills, ladders, hammers, vacuum, cleaner, steamer, power washer, etc.	
Electronics	Tablet, camera, projectors, stereo equipment, lighting equipment, etc.	

**Table C.3** Comparison of Swapping and Renting Websites as of January 2015.

	Swapping Websites (n = 75)	Renting Websites (n = 69)
<b>P2P, B2C, or Both?</b>	P2P 92.3% P2P, B2C 7.7%	P2P, B2C, B2B 10% P2P, B2C 13.3% P2P 70% B2C 3.3% B2C, B2B 1.7%
<b>Website, Mobile App, or both?</b>	Website 73% App 3.8% Both 23%	Website 78.3% App 6.67% Both 15%
<b>User Profiles</b>	Average 3.16 (Sufficient) Mode 4 (Good) Range 0-5 (No Profile features to Excellent)	Average 3.43 (Sufficient) Mode 5 (Excellent) Range 0-5 (No Profile features to Excellent)
<b>Forums</b>	Average 1.93 (Minimal/Poor Forum features) Mode 0 (No forum) Range 0 to 5 (No forum to Excellent Forum Activity)	Average 0.10 (No forum) Mode 0 (No forum) Range 0-2 (No forum to Poor forum features)
<b>Trust, Governance &amp; Privacy Policy</b>	Average 4.59 (Good) Mode 5 (Excellent) Range 2-5 (Poor security features to excellent trust)	Average 4.52 (Good) Mode 5 (Excellent) Range 0-5 (No security features to excellent trust)
<b>Cost to Users</b>	Free 47.4% Cost to Provider 26.3% Cost to Taker 5.3% Cost shared for Provider/Taker 21.1%	Free 31.9% Cost to Provider 55.3% Cost to Taker 4.3% Cost shared for Provider/Taker 6.4%
<b>Latest Activity on Website and/or Social Media</b>	Average 3.58 Mode 5 (Excellent) Range 1-5 (Minimal to Excellent)	Average 3.32 (Sufficient) Mode 2 (Poor) Range 2-5 (Poor to Excellent)
<b>Number of Facebook Likes</b>	<u>62% are using Facebook</u> Average 92,884 Likes Range 118 to 978,875 77.8% are less than 3,000 38.9% are less than 1,000	<u>90% are using Facebook</u> Average 2,845 Likes Range 24 to 72,237 91% are less than 5,000 61% are less than 1,000 50% are less than 500
<b>Twitter Following</b>	<u>79.3% are using Twitter</u> Average 7,326 followers Range 55 to 84,900 followers 52.2% are less than 1,000 34.8% are less than 500	<u>81% are using Twitter</u> Average 1,457 followers Range 0 to 25,400 72% are less than 1,000 54% are less than 500 26% are less than 100
<b>Pinterest, Flickr, Instagram</b>	34.5% using Pinterest 6.8% using Flickr	1.6% using all of them 16.1% using Pinterest 1.6% using Instagram 8.1% using Flickr
<b>Blog</b>	44.8% have a blog	53% have a blog
<b>Years in Operation</b>	Average 7.19 years Mode 4 years Range between 1-20 years	Average 4.02 years Mode 2 years Range between 1-13 years

## C.1 P2P Renting Websites

After concluding my interviews, all of the P2P renting websites being used by the respondents I interviewed have shut down. It was therefore important to show a snapshot of what these websites looked like at the time of my research. Using the Internet Archive (<https://archive.org/>), I am able to show a screenshot of a P2P renting website that was active during the time I interviewed respondents (see **Figure C.1**).

**Figure C.1** Example of P2P Renting Website: Screenshot of “Rentalic” as of 22 December 2010.



An extensive search<sup>130</sup> for P2P renting websites revealed 69 occurrences (**Table C.4**). Geographically, websites were most clustered around the USA (36%), Australia (9%), and the UK (17%). The remaining websites were either worldwide (or the location was unavailable), or found mostly in Canada, France, Singapore, Germany, Finland, and Austria.

**Table C.4** List of 69 Rental Websites found between 2011 and 2015.

Renting Websites		
1000tools.com	irent.fi	rentnotbuy.co.uk
anyhire.com	irent2u.com	rentoid.com
ayoopa.com	irentshare.com	renttycoons.com
bidandborrow.com	lenditmendit.com	rentwant.com
borrowedbydesign.com	letsallshare.com	rentything.com
bzike.com	loanables.com	sharegrid.com
cameralends.com	locloc.co.it	sharehammer.com
crowdrent.com	m.brightneighbor.com	sharely.us
datemywardrobe.com	maxloc.ca	shneeb.com
ecomodo.com	mitley.com	silibi.com
erent.com	mystuffforrent.com	snapgoods.com
erento.co.uk	neighborgoods.net	sparkplug.it
freegler.com	neighborsrentingstuff.com	spinlister.com
frents.com	ohsowe.com	streetlend.com
gearcommons.com	openshed.com.au	stylelend.com
gearlance.com	peerrenters.com	toolspinner.com
gearlope.com	graft.com	toolzdo.com
gearspoke.com	rentabilities	usarium.com
getbaro.com	rentaholic.co.nz	usetwice.at
hirejungle.co.uk	rentalic.com	villageluxe.com
hiremyclothes.com	rentez-vous.com	weekendswap.com
hirethings.co.nz	rentinstead.com	rentback.com
iletyou.com	rentmyitems.com	zilok.com

From my tracking of a sample of 62 websites taken from the list above, I now present some insights for P2P renting companies. Compared to swapping websites, rental companies started out broad and unfocused – with websites initially being called *Hire Things*, *Thing Loop*, and *Rent Stuff* (emphasis added). However, since this research began in 2011, there has been an emergence of more focused P2P rental sites toward specific products (e.g., Camera Lends, Gear Commons, Spark Plug). Overall,

<sup>130</sup> Updated as of January 2015

renting websites were more likely to have a general product focus or allow all types of products to be rented (62%).

**Figure C.2** Types of Objects for Rent.



In terms of the types of products promoted for rental (**Figure C.2** Types of Objects for Rent.), I found the majority of websites advertised general goods (62%), followed by adventure and outdoor goods (9%), fashion goods (9%), tools (4%), camera equipment (3%), bicycles (3%), textbooks (3%), musical equipment (3%), and technology (3%). Over the four year period I tracked their operations, 24% of renting websites ceased operation (either had completely shut down or were no longer active).<sup>131</sup> In addition, 12.9% of the websites had been rebranded or bought out by new investors so were in transition to a new

format. Renting websites that offered a general product focus were more likely to have shut down in this time period, 80% compared to only 20% for those that had had a specific product focus.

Responsibilities for object curation fell on Providers with all websites, as they were expected to list descriptions of their items for prospective Takers. However, some websites offered a feature for would-be renters to post a request for items that they were interested in renting, however at least 37% did not offer this option. I also found 3% of websites also offered an option to post items to rent so that the fees would go to a chosen charity. The vast majority of renting websites had a governance policy (98.4%) which emphasized trust between users and clearly explained solutions for when something could go wrong. Also, 96.8% of renting websites had a high level of user profile functionality. However, 64.5% of renting websites had no user forums to initiate interactions and communication between users.

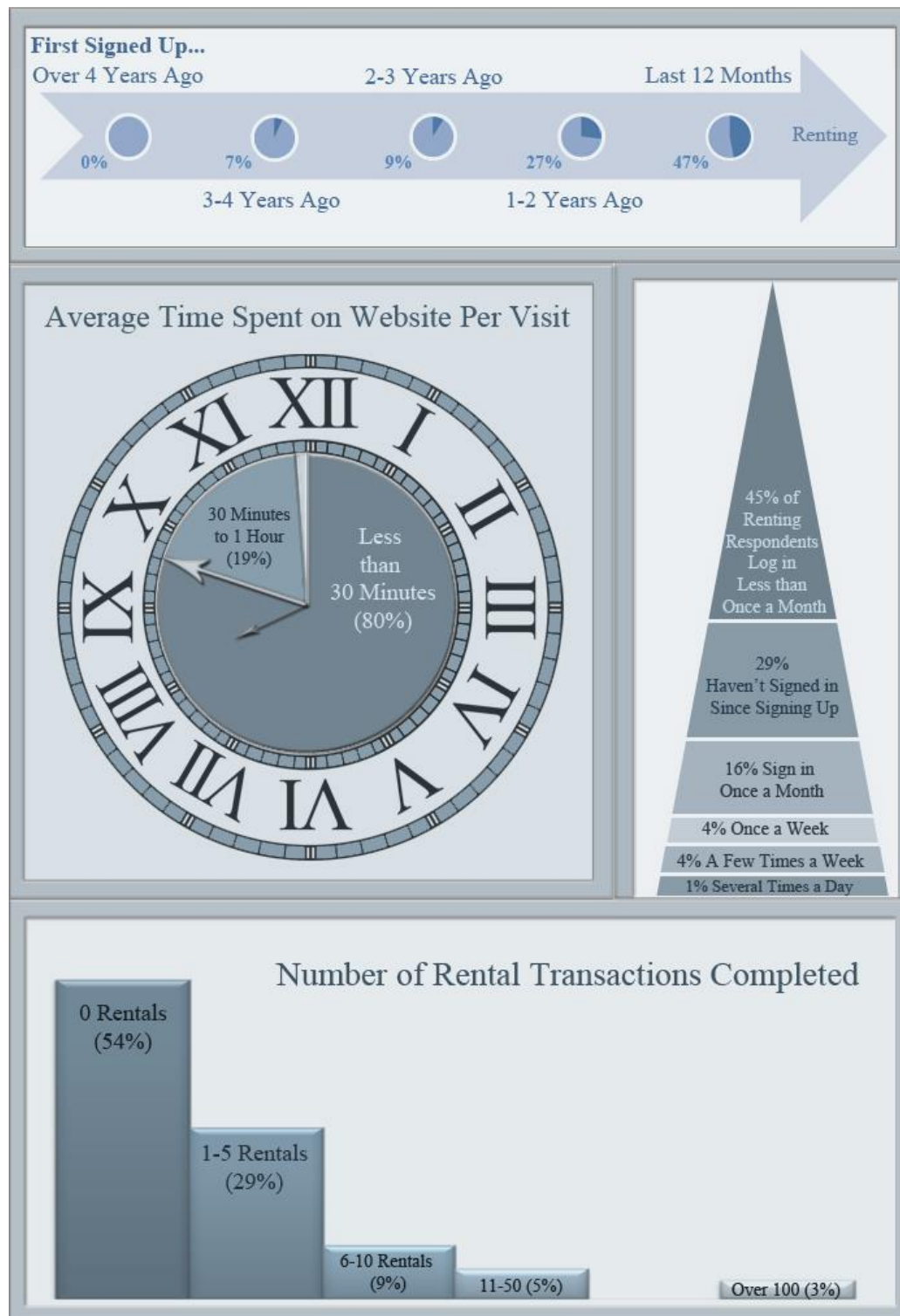
Unfortunately, accessing information about the number of trades completed was not available for the majority of the websites. Only two websites had the number of users visible (2,849 in the UK and 2000 in Finland – both offering general rental products).

<sup>131</sup> Because many of the websites were in transition or had shut down, I did not have a full picture of the items listed on the websites.

### P2P Renting – Temporality Considerations

Based on a survey with a sample of 69 responses from users of 26+ different renting websites (collected from 2014-2015), **Figure C.3** illustrates the generally low levels of participation and involvement by P2P rental users during the time of my study.

**Figure C.3** Temporality Snapshot for P2P Renting Users.



In addition to these websites devoted to P2P renting, I also found 50 Facebook pages and less than 20 online forums (e.g., Reddit) devoted to the facilitation of P2P renting between users (See **Table C.5**). From tracking the Facebook pages, I observed that these were all geographically focused, and many did not appear to be heavily used (2% had not been updated in years, 34% had not been updated in months, 26% in weeks, 12% in days, and 20% in hours from when I tracked the pages in January 2015). The average number of members signed up to these Facebook pages were 566, with a range of 12 to 8476 members, a median of 95, and a mode of 16.

**Table C.5** Sample of 50 Facebook Websites devoted to P2P Renting as of January 2015.

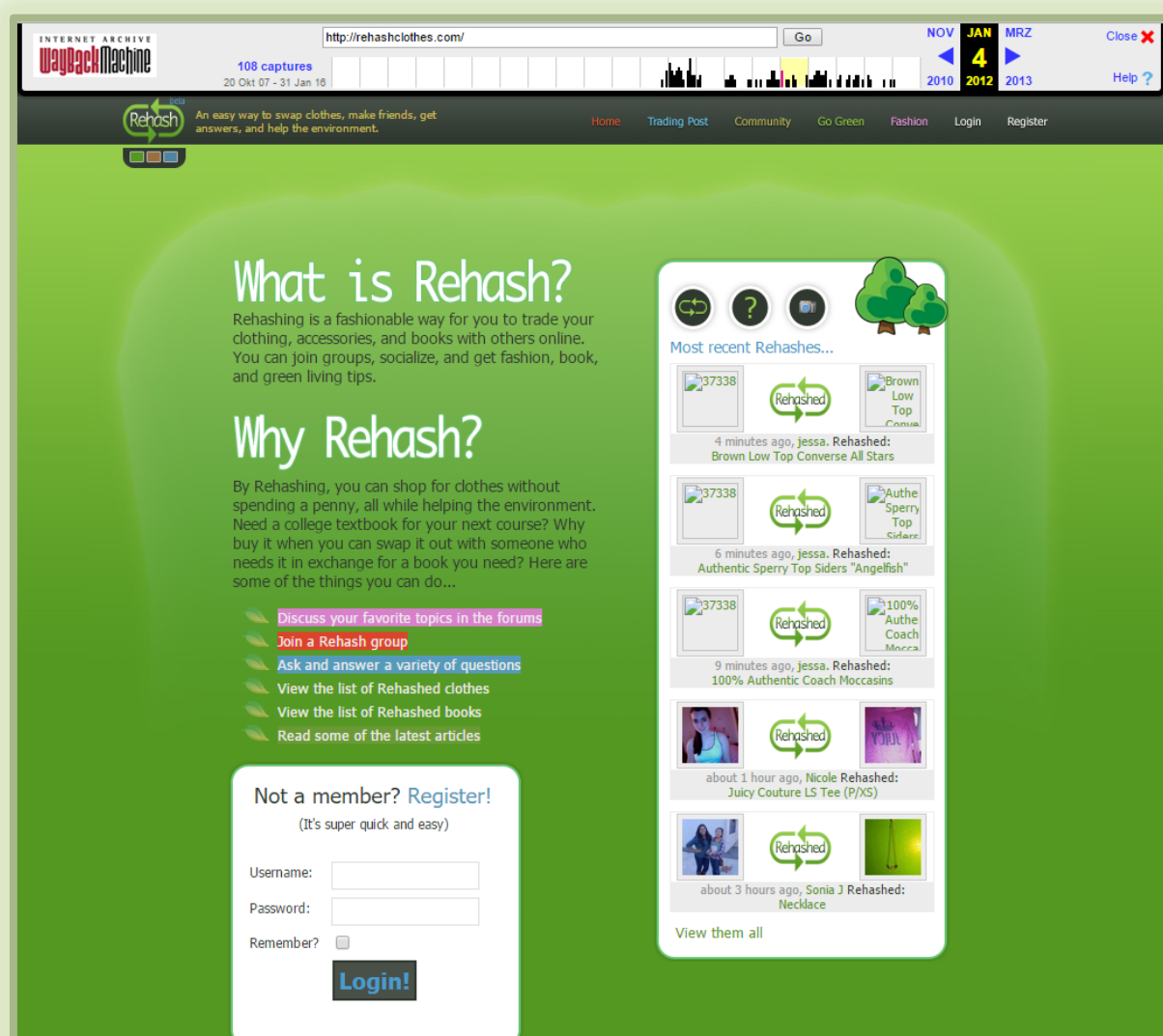
Rental Category	% (n)	Number of Members	Last Updated (Hours, Days, Weeks, Months, Years)
Adventure	2% (1)	160	W
Animal Gear	4% (2)	61, 62	D, W
Baby Gear	4% (2)	82, 206	H, W
Camera Gear	2% (1)	2587	H
Children	2% (1)	16	W
Clothing	4% (2)	27, 240	M, W
Costumes	6% (3)	25, 554, 1295	M, D, H
Dance Accessories and Costumes	6% (3)	27, 95, 113	M, W, W
Dresses	6% (3)	42, 44, 418	M, M, D
General	36% (18)	12, 16, 17, 33, 48, 51, 56, 95, 97, 99, 139, 212, 294, 295, 502, 535, 2037, 4659, 8476	M, M, M, M, W, M, Y, M, M, M, H, H, W, W, M, H, H, D, H
Home Goods	2% (1)	45	W
Party Goods	6% (3)	30, 62, 560	W, W, M
Prom outfits and accessories	4% (2)	623, 696	W, H
Tools	2% (1)	187	D
Toys	2% (1)	29	W
Weddings	10% (5)	16, 33, 59, 77, 2219	M, M, M, D, H



## C.2 Swapping Websites

After concluding my interviews, many of the swapping websites I interviewed respondents from have shut down or are now inactive. It was therefore important to show a snapshot of what these websites looked like at the time of my research. Using the Internet Archive (<https://archive.org/>), I am able to show a screenshot of a swapping website during the time I interviewed respondents (**Figure C.4**).

**Figure C.4** Example of Swapping Website: Screenshot of “Rehash” as of 4 January 2012.



An extensive search<sup>132</sup> for swapping websites revealed 75 occurrences (**Table C.6**).

<sup>132</sup> Updated as of January 2015



**Table C.6** List of 75 Swapping Websites found between 2011 and 2015.

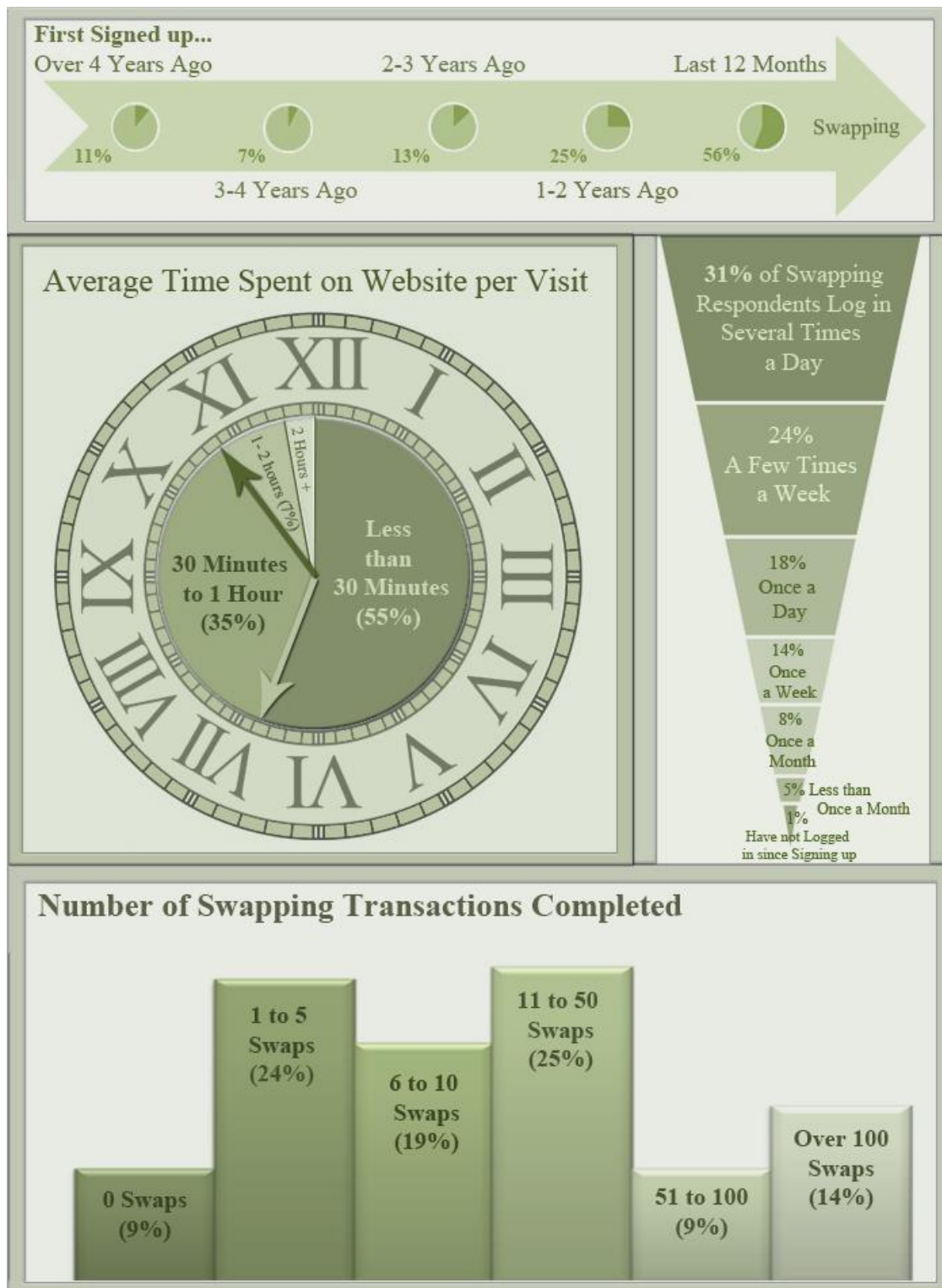
Swapping Websites		
99dresses.com	netcyclor.co.uk	swapnstuff.com
babyswap.net	paperbackswap.com	swap-o-matic.com
bartertown.com	Poshmark.com	swapshop.co.uk
bondsy.com	posh-swaps.com	swapsity.ca
bookins.com	readitswapit.co.uk	Swapster.com
bookmooch	rehashclothes.com	swapstyle.com
booksfreeswap.com	shneebz.com	swaptreasures.com
communityswapshop.com	skwag.com	SwapTree
dignswap.com	swap for good	SwapVillage
doubledutchery.com	swap.com	swapz.co.uk
ecofreek.com	swapacd.com	swishing.co.uk
epicski.com	Swapace.com	switchhouse.com
fribi.com	swapadvd.com	theclothingexchange
gaboomswap.com	swapagift	thredswap.com
giveplustake.com	swapbabygoods.com	titlitrader.com
gumtree.com	Swapbooks.com	toolzdo.com
hitflip.de	swap-bot.com	toyswap.com
irentshare.com	swapclub	u-exchange.com
jipio.com	swapclub.it	usetogether.com
keepio.com	swapcove	uswapit.ca
kinderado.com	swapdom.com	vinted.co.uk
m.brightneighbor.com	swapidu.com	WebSwap.com
makeupalley.com	swapitbaby.com	whatsonmybookshelf.com
MrSwap.com	swapitortradeit.co.nz	youswop.com
mumswap.com.au	swapmamas.com	zunafish.com

Compared to P2P renting, swapping websites have primarily followed a niche and targeted approach – there were numerous websites specifically geared towards books, baby goods and toys, clothing, and media.

### Online Swapping – Temporality Considerations

Based on a sample of 288 responses from users of 44+ swapping websites (collected from 2014-2015), **Figure C.5** illustrates the high levels of participation and involvement by swapping users.

**Figure C.5** Temporality Snapshot for Swapping Users.



In addition to these websites devoted to swapping between peers, I also found 379 Facebook pages and online forums (e.g., Reddit) devoted to the facilitation of swapping between peers. From the tracking of these sites, I observed that swapping pages were being used more often than P2P renting pages, and typically had more members (46% of pages had been last updated in hours, 16% had last been updated in days, 16% in weeks, 17% in months, and 4% in years). The average number of members signed up to these swapping Facebook pages were 2098, with a range of 12 to 85812 members, a median of 525, and a mode of 37.

Swapping Category	% (n)	Swapping Category	% (n)
Animal Gear	2% (6)	<b>General</b>	<b>23% (89)</b>
Baby Gear	2% (6)	Girly Things	0.2% (1)
Beauty	4% (15)	Holiday Items	2% (7)
Books General	3% (13)	Home Items – General	1% (5)
Books Audio	0.2% (1)	Home – Candles	0.2% (1)
Books Religious	0.2% (1)	Hunting Gear	1% (5)
Camera	0.8% (3)	Lawnmowers	0.2% (1)
Children	3% (11)	Makeup	1% (5)
Clothing - General	7% (25)	Men	1% (5)
Clothing - Dresses	4% (15)	Mom's	1% (5)
Clothing - Sporty	0.2% (1)	Movies	0.7% (3)
Collectibles	2% (6)	Movies and Music	0.2% (1)
Comics	4% (14)	Music	0.5% (2)
Costumes	0.2% (1)	Nail Polish	0.7% (3)
Crafts	2% (7)	Outdoor	3% (10)
Dance Costumes and Accessories	0.5% (2)	Prom	1% (5)
Electronics	1% (5)	Purses	3% (10)
Entertainment	0.2% (1)	Shoes - general	2% (7)
Events – Party Gear	0.5% (2)	Shoes - dancing	0.2% (1)
Games – Board Games	3% (12)	Sporting goods	0.2% (1)
Games – Video Games	8% (31)	Toys	3% (13)
Gear - general	0.2% (1)	Weddings	0.7% (3)